

Defense Manpower Data Center Service Academy 2007 Gender Relations Focus Groups Report



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Service Academy 2007 Gender Relations Focus Groups

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SERVICE ACADEMY 2007 GENDER RELATIONS FOCUS GROUPS

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SERVICE ACADEMY 2007 GENDER RELATIONS FOCUS GROUPS

Executive Summary

Service Academy 2007 Gender Relations Focus Group (SAGR2007) study is a focus group assessment conducted per U.S. Code 10 as amended by Section 532 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007. *SAGR2007* is part of an assessment cycle at the Service Academies that consists of alternating surveys and focus groups. Focus groups were conducted at all three Academies. Separate sessions were conducted for male and female students in each of the four class years.

Data from the focus groups were analyzed qualitatively for major themes and ideas conveyed across the sessions. For each theme, supporting comments from the focus group participants are included. Analysts used a combination of topical coding and repeated reviews to gather specific comments into the emerging themes. Where students differed in their opinions on a topic, both perspectives are presented in separate findings. Although focus group findings cannot be generalized to all students at each of the Academies, findings serve as illustrations of situations and themes for consideration by Academy officials as they review their programs.

Findings are presented in separate chapters for each Academy. Within chapters, the major themes are presented with specific findings and supporting comments from the students. Each comment identifies the gender of the student. Although the topics reported are similar for each Academy, no attempt was made to compare or generalize findings across Academies.

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SERVICE ACADEMY 2007 GENDER RELATIONS FOCUS GROUPS

Chapter 1: Introduction

Program evaluation and process improvements are integral to the success of programs implemented at the Service Academies to reduce sexual harassment and unwanted sexual contact/sexual assault, and to provide reporting and victim care procedures. Recurring evaluation of these programs is critical to reducing instances of harassment and assault as the Academies strive to provide a safe educational and leadership development environment for their students. One source of information for evaluating these programs and for assessing the gender relations environment at the Academies involves quantifiable feedback from students through a representative survey. Another source of information involves qualitative feedback from students through focus groups with a moderator who is trained to facilitate discussion on these topics. This report presents findings from the recent *Service Academy 2007 Gender Relations Focus Group (SAGR2007)* study. This introductory chapter provides background on why this study was conducted, a description of the focus group methodology, and a brief overview of subsequent chapters.

U.S. Code 10 as amended by Section 532 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 codified an assessment cycle at the Academies that consists of alternating surveys and focus groups. *SAGR2007* is the first focus group assessment. Previous assessments in this series were survey based, with the first conducted in 2004 by the DoD Inspector General (IG). Responsibility for subsequent assessments was transferred to the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) which conducted surveys in 2005 and 2006.

Focus Group Methodology

Unlike other research methods that employ statistical sampling and extrapolation of findings to the larger population, focus groups follow a qualitative research approach to collect subjective details from participants on a limited number of topics. The design for these focus groups was replicated for each session at each Academy to minimize any extraneous influences. Although the results cannot be generalized to the population of the Service Academies, they provide insights into issues and ideas for further consideration. Procedures for selecting participants, developing the questions, and analyzing the data are described below.

Selection of Participants

Participants were selected at random at each Service Academy. To select participants, each Service Academy first supplied DMDC a roster of all the cadets or midshipmen including names, class year, gender, and other identifying information needed by the Academy to locate the student. The roster excluded foreign national students, as well as exchange students. DMDC randomized the list of students within clusters defined by gender and class year. The rosters

were then returned to each respective Academy and it was the responsibility of each Academy to use their randomized list to identify the first ten students who were available (did not have a class scheduled during the focus group) to attend the focus group appropriate for their gender and class year. Students were contacted by their Academy and notified of their selection to participate in the focus group. Acceptable reasons for being excused from the focus groups after being selected were minimal, but included being on travel or being hospitalized. In some cases additional students were identified to participate as backups. Therefore, session sizes ranged from eight to thirteen, depending on the number of students who attended the session or were excused.

Development of Questions

To begin the collaborative effort of developing focus group questions, DMDC analysts drafted potential questions by reviewing notes and findings from the *Service Academy 2006 Gender Relations Survey (SAGR2006)*. Analysts looked for follow-up topics that might clarify or expand on findings from the previous year's survey. A list of preliminary questions was generated and provided to the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), as well as each Service Academy, for their input. A revised set of questions incorporating comments from SAPRO and the Academies was compiled with overlapping or duplicate topics removed. The revised set of questions was then returned to SAPRO and the Academies for final revisions. Eight questions with additional subquestions (probing questions) were presented to participants at each Academy, with one additional Academy-specific question asked at the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) at their request. The topics addressed were:

- Sexual harassment and sexual assault—definitions, examples observed, impact of unwelcome humor, contributing factors, and differentiation between sexual harassment and assault
- Future leader preparation—the extent to which experiences prepare cadets/midshipmen for their role as officers
- Use of alcohol—the role of alcohol in sexual harassment and assault
- Communications—Academy practices in disseminating information about sexual harassment and assault
- Safety—students' perceptions about safety from sexual harassment and assault
- Training—student opinions about the training they receive in sexual harassment and assault prevention and response
- Mechanics of reporting—details on understanding of the mechanisms for reporting sexual harassment and assault
- Reasons for not reporting—discussion of possible reasons one would not report an incident of sexual harassment or assault

- Dating relationships (USNA only)—discussion of policies regarding dating among midshipmen

Note that these questions included additional probing questions to stimulate discussion and delve deeper into topics. These questions were asked in each session, but facilitators varied the order to reduce any effect based on fatigue.²⁰²

Conducting the Focus Groups

DMDC provided two focus group facilitators who led the sessions at all three Academies. A male facilitator led the male focus groups and a female facilitator led the female focus groups. Both facilitators participated in the subsequent qualitative analysis of the data.

Focus groups were scheduled based on class year and gender. At USNA and the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA), eight 90-minute focus groups sessions were conducted. Due to a scheduled class time constraint of 45-minute periods, sixteen focus group sessions were conducted at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) with two for each class year by gender. Half of the questions were asked in each shorter focus group. USMA was the first Academy visited with focus groups conducted between April 10-13. Focus groups at the USAFA were conducted between April 16-20 and the USNA April 23-26. Between eight and thirteen students participated in each session. Focus groups were held in conference rooms or classrooms on each Service Academy campus. DMDC provided a recorder who used a stenographic machine to transcribe all comments from students and the facilitator. Transcripts were provided to each Academy and to SAPRO after they were cleaned of all identifying comments and names. No audio or video recording was made of any focus group session. All focus group sessions were governed by a number of ground rules, most notably that they were all non-attribution sessions where students were advised of the purpose for the recorder, but made aware that their names or comments would not be attributed back to them. Students were encouraged to provide information generally but not to specify personal experiences, names, or identifying comments if possible. Students were also advised not to share information learned within the focus groups after the session was concluded.

Analysis Methodology

Data from the focus groups were analyzed qualitatively for major themes and ideas conveyed across the sessions. The order of presentation does not imply that any one theme is more important than any other. For each theme, supporting comments from the focus group participants are included. The supporting comments do not include every comment made on a particular theme, rather they illustrate the theme in the words of the cadets and midshipmen. No attempt was made to quantify the number of comments made on a specific theme.

²⁰² Although there was no evidence to suggest that focus group participants became tired or restless as the sessions progressed, the order of questions was varied to ensure each question was presented first in one or two sessions.

Caution must be applied to the review of the findings presented. The results are based on qualitative analysis—findings cannot be generalized to all students at each of the Academies. Findings should be viewed as illustrations of situations and themes for consideration by Academy officials as they review their programs. Findings may also be viewed as a general perspective on students' views of sexual assault and sexual harassment at their Academies, but do not portray a statistical report on incident rates or performance of response and prevention programs.

Categorization of Topics

Focus group analysts reviewed transcripts to identify major themes. Although findings tended to cluster around the main questions asked in the sessions, categorization based on the questions was not an *a priori* requirement. Analysts were sensitive to themes that emerged from the questions. Analysts used a combination of topical coding and repeated reviews to gather specific comments into the emerging themes. Where students differed in their opinions on a topic, both perspectives are presented in separate findings.

Organization of Findings

Findings are presented in separate chapters for each Academy. Within chapters, the major themes are presented with specific findings and supporting comments from the students. Each comment identifies the gender of the student. Caution must be exercised in reviewing these findings. Comments should not be viewed as representative of all other students. Finally, although many of the themes are similar across the three Academies, each Academy should be viewed separately. No attempt was made to compare or generalize across Academies.

Chapter 2: U.S. Military Academy

Sixteen focus group sessions were conducted at USMA between April 10-13. Each session was scheduled for a 45-minute period to accommodate the scheduled class time constraint. There were two sessions held for each gender for each class year, each with between eight and thirteen students.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment was one of the main subjects addressed in the *SAGR2007* focus groups. Cadets were asked to discuss the definition of sexual harassment, how often they see it happening, possible reasons for it happening at USMA, and how much it is tolerated on campus. The topic of sexual humor was also explored in this discussion.

Definition and Examples of Sexual Harassment

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that sexual harassment is when someone makes a verbal statement that is offensive to someone else.**
 - *“I think sexual harassment is anything that is inappropriate, and makes a person feel uncomfortable.”* (Male)
 - *“[It is] unwanted comments or gestures toward a member of the same or opposite sex. I don’t think it matters what sex the person is.”* (Male)
 - *“[Sexual harassment is] whatever makes you uncomfortable.”* (Female)
 - *“It’s like an unwanted advance or unwanted comments.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants gave the following examples of sexual harassment:**
 - *“Somebody makes a sexist comment or a joke at a person’s expense.”* (Male)
 - *“Innuendos or suggestive comments.”* (Female)
 - *“A guy talking to you about something you don’t want and continuing once you tell him to stop.”* (Female)
 - *“If you’re making a joke about somebody and they say, ‘Hey you know, it’s not funny,’ and if you keep doing it, then that becomes harassment.”* (Male)
- **However, focus group participants, especially the men, indicated that it is difficult to define and give examples of sexual harassment because what offends one person does not necessarily offend another person.**

- *“Something could be said and interpreted one way by someone and that would constitute sexual harassment, whereas the same thing may be said in a different setting and a different audience and that may not be interpreted as sexual harassment.”* (Male)
- *“It’s when someone oversteps the boundaries that you’ve set for yourself in terms of defining that. I think that for different people, you have a different boundary of what’s acceptable to you; I mean, depending on how you were brought up. Even so much as certain words being used that might offend one person and not another. So sexual harassment would be where someone—like they cross your boundary and make you uncomfortable.”* (Female)
- *“It’s different for whoever you’re around, because some people are offended, not easier, but just certain things offend them more than they would offend another person. I think you kind of have to watch what you say around certain people because, it’s not a bad thing, but because some people just grew up in different families.”* (Male)
- *“The definition of sexual harassment is very general, open, or vague. It’s defined, but it also depends on the girl you’re talking to.”* (Male)

Extent of Sexual Harassment on Campus

- **Both male and female focus group participants indicated that sexual harassment is not a serious issue at the Academy because they have rarely seen it or heard of it happening.**
 - *“I believe people are pretty aware of respect issues and who’s around them. I don’t really notice that much [sexual harassment].”* (Male)
 - *“I’ve never been offended by any of the comments anyone has said here. I don’t feel victimized by it.”* (Female)
 - *“I don’t walk down the hall in my building and see somebody getting verbally harassed on a daily, weekly, monthly, or even yearly basis. I’ve never personally walked by and just seen somebody or heard something that I would find blatantly offensive or insulting.”* (Male)
 - *“I guess it happens, but I don’t think it is an issue here. I wouldn’t say it’s a culture issue. I would say maybe it’s a few individuals.”* (Female)
- **Although most participants in the focus groups did not perceive sexual harassment to be a problem, a few first class (senior) women had a concern about it.**

- *“I think sexual harassment is a problem at the Academy. It’s a problem in the Army. But it’s a problem in society in general. I mean, in the workplace it happens all the time, but it doesn’t make it any more okay, and here it just makes it harder for the women being a minority. ... I know a girl who reported a male during her Camp Buckner [field training location] experience for referring to women by the C-word²⁰³, and she was silenced by her company, including the other women.”* (Female)
- *“The stigma of [Boys I²⁰⁴] is still here. Just last semester some of the upperclass cadets got in trouble for, I’m not sure, either buying hats that said ‘Boys I’ or walking around saying ‘Boys I’ or something like that.”* (Female)
- **Older participants in the focus groups indicated that sexual harassment happens less often now than it did a few years ago.**
 - *“The Sup [Superintendent] got up in a briefing and said he doesn’t want to hear anybody use the word ‘trou’²⁰⁵ anymore, and there was a marked decrease from then on.”* (Male)
 - *“I think I’ve heard less ‘trou’ jokes since I’ve been here. I feel I heard a lot of them my plebe [freshman] year, and then as time has gone on, because they made it such a focus, I feel like they’re discussing it and it has become less of an issue. I feel like the plebes have never even heard it or heard of anyone using that term. I don’t think they learn it like they used to. So I think [sexual harassment] is decreasing, at least in my experience.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that the frequency of sexual harassment might be overstated in survey results.**
 - *“They say from the survey last year that, like, 30% of the people were sexually harassed and only ten of them actually reported it. But I don’t think it’s that high. I think they’re getting the numbers of harassment from, like, jokes. They ask, ‘Have you ever heard a sexual joke?’ And you’re like, ‘Yes,’ and they’re counting that as sexual harassment.”* (Female)

²⁰³ The “C-word” is a common euphemism that refers to a derogatory term for women.

²⁰⁴ “Boys I” is a term used to reference the last company at USMA to graduate a woman when USMA became coeducational and who created the nickname to refer to themselves and their pride for maintaining only men for so long.

²⁰⁵ “Trou” is a derogatory term used at USMA to refer to female cadets.

- *“I think the biggest thing with those surveys, is if you say you felt even remotely, like, sexually harassed, it appears as, ‘Oh, that’s 50 percent of the Corps,’ and those are the numbers that get put out to us.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated sexual harassment is not a big concern at the Academy because women are typically not afraid to speak up when something offends them, and men typically stop when asked to do so.**
 - *“I think most people are comfortable telling someone [when something] offends them. And even if it is an upperclassman or something, they’re not afraid to speak up.”* (Male)
 - *“I think that if someone brings it up and makes [the offender] aware that they feel they were harassed, I feel like basically in all cases, [the offender] will respect that individual enough to stop.”* (Male)
- **Because of the emphasis placed on the topic of sexual harassment, some male focus group participants indicated they are worried that they will mistakenly say something that may be interpreted as harassment.**
 - *“It’s the scariest thing to think that a slip of the tongue will really kind of hurt you here when it’s not intended that way. And I think it hurts a lot of the relations between the two [genders].”* (Male)
 - *“I think there’s a pretty strong desire to jump on it. ... There’s almost like a kind of feeling sometimes of like a secret police, where not only if you do anything harassing, but if you say anything that isn’t in line with the Academy’s values, then you’re going to get jumped on.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated the fear of saying something wrong without intending to can affect the way men interact with their female subordinates in a professional capacity.**
 - *“I think there’s a large majority of male cadets here that believe they’re restricted in what they can say, like if you have a female subordinate and you’re her first-line supervisor, you might be afraid to come down hard on her or something like that, where if it was a male you would be in their face if they failed to do something. But you can’t really do that on a female because what’s stopping her from turning around and calling CPD [Center for Personal Development] to say, ‘I’ve been sexually harassed,’ just because she’s upset or something like that?”* (Male)

- *“I know there are standards for girls’ hair and I know there are standards for makeup and earrings, but I don’t even look at that stuff. I just ignore it because I don’t want to try to make a correction.”* (Male)
- *“Let’s say somebody makes a blatant mistake in their job and you’re afraid to critique them in a specific way because they might be offended, or you can’t come down hard on them or you can’t make a quick correction so consequently, what do you do? Do you just sit there? It’s a floating standard.”* (Male)

Reasons for Sexual Harassment

- **When asked why sexual harassment happens, some male participants in the focus groups indicated that, when it happens, it’s because people do not always realize they are doing it.**
 - *“I think it happens partly because it’s such a hard thing to define. It’s kind of like pornography, or obscenity; I can’t really define it but I know it when I see it. Maybe part of the reason is because the gender gap makes it a different environment than what most people were growing up in.”* (Male)
 - *“There’s definitely a gray area about what sexual harassment is, because I know I’ve said stuff and didn’t even realize it, and people are like, ‘Do you realize what you just said?’ You don’t even mean to do it but something comes out the wrong way.”* (Male)
- **Female focus group participants indicated that men sometimes forget that there are women around who may be offended by certain comments.**
 - *“We go to a school that’s like 85% guys, so sometimes I think they forget that there are girls here that would be offended.”* (Female)
 - *“In any environment that has more males than females, sometimes the guys might forget there’s a girl in the room and make a joke or something.”* (Female)
- **Female focus group participants also indicated that women do not always tell men to stop when they hear an offensive comment.**
 - *“If you’re joking and you realize the guy might be getting serious, you’re like, ‘Stop.’ But sometimes girls don’t do that and they just let it happen, and some guys don’t realize they should stop.”* (Female)
 - *“With my friends, guys will be joking with them a lot and some girls will just sit there and take it, and I’m like, ‘Why don’t you just say something back, because if you do, they’ll stop.’”* (Female)

- “Guys know when they can say stuff to certain girls and when they can’t so if you give the impression that a guy can say anything he wants to you, then he’s going to say something inappropriate.” (Female)

Tolerance of Sexual Harassment

- **For the most part, focus group participants agreed that sexual harassment is not tolerated at the Academy.**
 - “It’s not tolerated. ... I think cadets are really audience-aware of what’s going on, especially with the program here, ... and I’ve never seen blatant verbal sexual harassment.” (Male)
 - “I think we have so many different channels to go through – you can go through your tactical officer, your chain of command, your Respect Program, and other things, that no one really feels conflicting loyalties.” (Male)
 - “I think once it’s brought up, the Academy takes it really seriously. The higher level people take it seriously and if it really is an issue, they’ll deal with it.” (Female)
 - “It would be reported here faster than somewhere on the outside. ... Because of the repercussions for not doing something, nobody would try to back-door it or cover it up.” (Male)
- **There is one exception to the general feeling that sexual harassment is not tolerated at the Academy; some first class (senior) women in the focus groups indicated that sexual harassment is a concern because of some degree of toleration for it that exists.**
 - “Like the ‘trou’²⁰⁶ thing, I don’t know how often I’ve heard the word ‘trou’ but I don’t think I ever once heard somebody say, ‘Don’t use that word,’ right after it’s been said.” (Female)
 - “I think for some people, a desire to fit in with the guys can sometimes cloud judgment as far as when to say, ‘Stop’ or when to say, ‘That’s inappropriate.’” (Female)
 - “I had an experience [with sexual harassment] ... a few years ago ... and I didn’t directly report it, but it came out and I ended up reporting it to my battalion TAC [tactical officer]. There’s a different chain of command now.

²⁰⁶ “Trou” is a derogatory term used at USMA to refer to female cadets.

[Back then] I read something that probably wasn't meant for me to read, but I did, and it was really derogatory towards women. It slammed everybody. ... I don't remember everything, but I do remember him telling me that I probably should have just turned my eye on it. It was a joke. It wasn't meant to be offensive. ... To have this Major sitting there telling me I shouldn't have cared was really, like, well there's the problem. You have TACs telling people it's okay to call girls sluts here." (Female)

- **Some first class (senior) women in the focus groups blame this tolerance on the accepting culture in some companies, and the immaturity of some cadets.**
 - *"I think it all depends on the atmosphere within companies. In my company, nothing is tolerated as far as that goes because my TAC has always said that the most important thing is, 'You are all brothers and sisters. If you do anything to hurt each other, I will kill you.' Everyone respects that, and they know the moment they cross that line, they're basically done. [But not all companies are like mine.]"* (Female)
 - *"It also depends on classes. I know that our class is probably the most mature class here and it's not just because we're the firsties [seniors], but that's just the way [we are]. You see the cows [juniors] and the yuks [sophomores], and they don't understand the importance of sexual harassment, how you can't do it or why you can't say certain things to certain people. But a lot of it has to do with immaturity."* (Female)
- **Fourth class (freshman) women in the focus groups indicated that they felt especially protected from sexual harassment because they could count on their male classmates and the upperclassmen to intervene when needed.**
 - *"If you're really good friends with a guy he knows he can say something around you and you're not going to be offended. But if he gets around other guys and they start saying stuff, he'll be like, 'That's not cool.' It's kind of like a family type thing."* (Female)
 - *"When it happens to underclassmen by upperclassmen, [the underclassmen] are afraid to actually come forth and say anything, so usually it's another upperclassman that will approach [the offender] and say, 'You need to take care of this.'"* (Female)

Sexual Humor

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that humor on varying subjects was a part of cadet life.**

- *“The upperclassmen always ask for a joke at a meal, and some of them ask for some of the more sexist jokes or whatever.” (Male)*
- *“If it offends you, like, it offends you as a joke teller, then you can abstain from saying it. But I guess if it’s something that you would be okay with and he has asked you to say it, then I guess it goes kind of under the [rule] that he ordered you to do it.” (Male)*
- *“I know there have been jokes at some of the tables and I’ve been able to correct it by saying, ‘Hey, we’re at the table, there are subordinates and superiors and that kind of joke shouldn’t be done at the table.’ Things like that do happen, and if people don’t correct it, then they’re going to continue doing it.” (Female)*
- *“I think everybody jokes about a lot of things, and it’s kind of rampant. About race, about homophobia, about gender. Jokes of that nature, a broad column of inappropriateness. But then again, I would argue that’s a cultural thing, not to say that it’s okay, but we’re on a normal track, I think, comparing ourselves to other institutions.” (Female)*
- **The first class (senior) women in the focus groups who felt that sexual harassment was a concern also indicated that they felt that sexual humor was somewhat of a concern.**
 - *“I think there are plenty of jokes referring to ‘trou food’²⁰⁷ and ‘trou cake’ that make some people uncomfortable eating at a table. I’m not going to say everybody, but I’ve been at a table where several ‘trou’ comments have been made, and it usually is in regard to dessert or whatever.” (Female)*
 - *“[Women] have different standards on our physical tests than the men do, so that’s where you hear [sexual humor]. I mean, aside from eating.” (Female)*
- **Participants in the focus groups, however, indicated that sexual humor was not a serious concern as long as people were aware of the issue and stopped when someone asked them to.**
 - *“Usually if something does come up, like where someone tells a joke [and someone else is offended], a person would go to them and tell them, ‘Hey cool it,’ or ‘Don’t be saying that kind of stuff around me.’ I think it usually ends there.” (Male)*

²⁰⁷ “Trou” is a derogatory term used at USMA to refer to female cadets.

- *“My peers at home are less reserved than the people here at school. I mean, I think it all depends on where you’re from, but I just don’t think that the inappropriate jokes that are going on here are isolated to the Academies or USMA. It’s our generation.”* (Female)
- *“For me, it just goes back to your personal boundaries and what you’re comfortable with. ... I believe it’s different for everybody and I think that’s okay. I think that as long as everybody knows what those boundaries are and they don’t let other people cross them ... just say ‘Stop’ and in my experience it stops.”* (Female)
- **When asked to explain when a joke was no longer funny but crossed the line into something offensive, focus group participants gave the following examples:**
 - *“If you have to think about whether it’s offensive or not, then it’s probably offensive. I was told, ‘If you think something’s wrong, just don’t tell it.’”* (Male)
 - *“[I heard a joke] that was mixed, like a racial and female joke. And that’s when it crosses the line.”* (Female)
 - *“I think it’s the manner that it’s presented in. ... In certain situations you almost feel like they’re getting enjoyment out of saying a crude thing. Like if you have the guy up in the front of the crowd, like a bragging-type thing and he’s saying a really crude belittling thing, and he’s doing it to get attention-type thing. Whereas another joke at the lunch table, well it’s just the lunch table. They’re just talking about their day or what they’re going to do on the weekend.”* (Female)
 - *“I don’t think you should say a joke if you won’t say it to your mom. But that’s not just about sexual harassment, that’s about anything. I think innuendo is fine, but when it’s blatant and vulgar, I think is when it crosses the line.”* (Female)

Safety and Sexual Assault and Harassment

Students were asked for their input on why cadets may or may not feel safe at the Academy from sexual assault and harassment. Feedback on some of the policies designed to keep students safe was also given.

Definition and Seriousness of Sexual Assault

- **Participants in the focus groups defined sexual assault as being “something physical,” such as “an actual physical attack” or rape.**

- **Participants indicated that any amount of sexual assault would be a serious problem if it happened to a cadet, but most did not worry about it on a day-to-day basis.**
 - *“I think anytime you have a sexual assault, it’s a problem. It might not happen to me, but if it happens to one of my classmates, then it’s a problem even if it’s not as widespread as sexual harassment.”* (Female)
 - *“I know it can happen, it’s possible, but personally I’m not worried about it when I walk around here.”* (Female)
 - *“I think for me, I’ve never felt unsafe in that regard here; I’ve never had that sort of concern for my personal well-being.”* (Female)
 - *“Well, I think maybe for a lot of people, I don’t know, but it’s—I think relatively West Point is like a real, real—like assault-wise, it’s really, really safe. But the way it’s made into this big issue and it’s in our face all the time, people might feel like it happens all the time.”* (Male)
- **Older participants in the focus groups indicated that the climate for avoiding and responding to sexual assault was better now than it was a few years ago.**
 - *“My plebe [freshman] year we had drunk firsties [seniors] coming in almost every night to my room just to sit and talk to us. Stuff like that doesn’t happen, at least not nearly as frequently as it did then. And I remember I was assaulted in the barracks but I never reported it because I was so afraid of the way the climate was. But looking back on it now, I would say probably you could come forward and it would be a lot easier. So I think it’s much better.”* (Female)

Feelings of Safety

- **Focus group participants indicated that they take care of each other, which makes them feel safer than their friends who attend other colleges.**
 - *“I feel safer here than at home because there are MPs [military police], cadets, and officers all expecting you to have a certain amount of character, and everyone here that I know are good people, so I feel surrounded by good people.”* (Female)
 - *“The thought doesn’t even occur to me that I’m unsafe.”* (Female)
 - *“Even walking down to the gym really early, at 0500 in the morning, I feel completely fine, even though it’s completely dark.”* (Female)

- *“I think in comparison to other civilian colleges, it’s a lot safer here. I know at a normal civilian college, my friends won’t go running in the evening after it’s dark because they don’t feel safe, and I’ve never felt it’s not safe to go running or to go out in the evenings.”* (Female)
- *“I think how they have the barracks arranged [helps]. If the females were separated, I wouldn’t be as comfortable. Since we have guys next to us, I feel more comfortable because they’re close by. If a guy is trying to come in your room or you have an issue with sexual assault or harassment, there’s always a bigger guy that can come help.”* (Female)
- **When pressed, participants in the focus groups indicated a few places on campus where people might not feel totally safe.**
 - *“There are rumors that you can go to [the sixth floor of Washington Hall] to get away from everybody, and that kind of goes along with putting yourself in a [dangerous] situation. If the guy wants you to go to a place where no one else is and you don’t trust him, then you shouldn’t go.”* (Female)
 - *“The walk back on a Saturday night from Thayer Gate to the barracks, from South Gate or one of the bars in Highland Falls. I think that is an area where you have males passing females and they’re probably intoxicated and sexual harassment can definitely take place in that walk.”* (Male)
 - *“The tunnel behind Washington Hall, where the trucks drop off food or whatever. I guess if you’re taking a shortcut to the First Reg [First Regiment] or something, it’s kind of like a secluded place.”* (Male)

Reasons for Not Feeling Safe

- **When asked why a student might not feel safe from sexual harassment or sexual assault, participants in the focus groups were not sure, but speculated on the following reasons or situations:**
 - Because safety policies exist: *“I think the only reason people may not feel safe is that ... we’re supposed to have an Honor Code and we’re supposed to respect each other, ... but yet we’re told to lock our valuables and lock the doors at night. And just the simple fact that we have to take those measures makes it feel a little bit uncomfortable.”* (Female)
 - Because of past experiences: *“Some of the girls [who reported feeling unsafe in the survey] could be ones that were previously sexually assaulted or harassed.”* (Female)

- On weekends when fewer people are around: *“There might not necessarily be an area where someone might not be safe, but hypothetically, if you look at the time frame, if it’s a weekend and everyone gets out of here and there isn’t a cadet presence, then maybe that would be an instance where vulnerability would go up...[because] no one’s around.”* (Male)
- When alcohol is involved: *“In situations involving alcohol, when people come back from the Firstie Club²⁰⁸, a lot of those instances happen when both parties are drunk and that’s when someone else ends up in someone else’s room or something like that.”* (Female)
- **When asked specifically about summer experiences, some focus group participants indicated that they can see how students might feel unsafe during the summer when they come in contact with people from outside the Academy.**
 - *“I’ve never had a problem with cadets. I think the biggest issues I have seen have been over the summer when either you’re out in the regular Army or the regular Army is brought in here.”* (Female)
 - *“I think girls get hit on during the summer training by the Active Force all the time, and I’m sure they feel really uncomfortable about it, but I think if one of the cadets saw it happening or kind of noticed a girl was uncomfortable, they would totally step in.”* (Male)
 - *“I think there are some issues at Cadet Troop Lead Training where you go out into the Army and you’re not in this environment, you’re not at USMA, so you’re interacted with and treated differently than you would be here. I think some people might feel a little more uncomfortable. You’re around people you’ve never seen before or met before and suddenly you’re under them or in charge of them, so for some people it might make you feel uncomfortable.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants gave examples where potentially unsafe events have happened during field training at Camp Buckner.**
 - *“Sometimes as a female you’re going to get sent to places where there’s actually a greater male population and they haven’t received all of the sensitivity training that the guys have gotten here. I know a couple of females during Buckner had problems with some of the enlisted males that were there to teach us, and they would verbally attack some of the females. They would come after them, like ‘Why are you doing this?’ and the females said, ‘All the other people are doing it too, why are you coming after me?’”* (Female)

²⁰⁸ The Firstie Club is an on-campus bar for seniors that serves food and beer.

- *“I had a situation during Buckner [field training location] with one of the assistant trainers or whatever, an enlisted guy. That’s the only time I’ve ever had problems either with sexual assault or harassment.”* (Female)
- *“You hear a lot of jokes and stuff about, we call it ‘Buckner Love.’ Like this coming summer we’re going to Buckner and you always hear about people trying to go off in the woods and hook up. But you don’t hear so many times about the guy dragging the girl away into the woods, usually the joke is consensual.”* (Male)

Policies to Insure Safety in the Dorms

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that, in general, the locked door policy has addressed past concerns about personal safety in the dorms.**
 - *“A lot of [past] issues were after hours, guys going in the girls rooms or girls letting guys in their room and stuff like that. Now you have an accountability issue. The door has to be locked. If the issue does happen, which I haven’t heard much of any more, it kind of takes it away.”* (Male)
 - *“I think the locked door policy has, from what I hear, created a lot less problems because there are no longer cows [juniors] and firsties [seniors] coming back drunk from their little clubs and they can no longer just open a door and walk in there into another female cadet’s room.”* (Male)
 - *“The doors are locked, so if people are really drunk and they want to go into a girl’s room, they can’t because if she’s locked the door, then it’s like a precaution. I guess in the past, we heard that that was a problem, guys coming into girls’ rooms. So I think that addresses that issue fairly well.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated the locked door policy has enhanced safety.**
 - *“I feel safe with my door locked.”* (Female)
 - *“I think our rooms are pretty well established as safe with the locked door policy.”* (Male)
 - *“Nothing’s going to happen at night if there’s an officer that goes around or a cadet officer that goes around and checks every single door and makes sure that every single door is locked. ... I think it’s good that they mandate that because that will prevent all those [sexual assault] cases.”* (Male)

- *“I like the policy because it makes it okay to lock your door. It makes a huge culture change here. ...And it’s a positive step towards preventing incidents from recurring. It’s not the best solution but it’s a positive step towards a good solution.”* (Female)
- **Some focus groups participants indicated that the locked door policy may or may not be necessary, but that it is worth doing if it gives women an added feeling of security.**
 - *“I don’t think that there’s necessarily a threat here, ... but I think alcohol is a big thing that just kind of adds to the situation, and I feel good having my door locked. ... I feel a lot more comfortable with it.”* (Female)
 - *“I think it’s a great policy. Obviously, I’m a big guy. I’m not scared of somebody coming into my bed at night and raping me. But the problem is, there have been incidents where females have been assaulted by somebody drunk after taps. Those females probably felt safe, that’s why their door was unlocked that night. So that’s the problem - we feel safe so I don’t think a lot of people will [lock their doors without a locked door policy], and that’s not protecting [anyone].”* (Male)
 - *“I don’t have a problem with it whatsoever if it makes one person feel safe. It’s not that difficult for me to lock my door. Getting in trouble for it is retarded, but the fact that you have a lock on your door should be fine.”* (Male)
- **Some male focus group participants indicated that the locked door policy should be optional for men, and resented that they could get into trouble for forgetting to lock their doors.**
 - *“It should be more optional. As a guy, I don’t feel threatened by the females.”* (Male)
 - *“During the day you can’t lock your door because they think you’re behind the door having sex, but at night they want you to lock your door to prevent anyone from coming to your room and having sex. It seems kind of childish. ... They should give us the responsibility and say, ‘If you feel that you don’t feel safe at night, lock your door.’”* (Male)
 - *“It should be a free use. I have to lock my door and I know no gal is going to come in my room, but if I forget, I’ll get punished. It should be if you don’t feel right, then do it, because my locked door isn’t going to stop me from leaving my room. I think it’s an absurd policy. It should just be a free use. If you don’t feel good at night, lock your door.”* (Male)

- *“I don’t think cadets should be punished for not locking their doors at night. I just got ten hours²⁰⁹ for that and I don’t appreciate that at all. Because I’m not afraid I’m going to get raped if my door is unlocked. I’m afraid the Officer in Charge is going to walk in.”* (Male)
- **Another concern expressed about the locked door policy by focus group participants was that the dorm rooms get hot in the summer when the doors are closed.**
 - *“During the summer months when it’s really hot and they expect you to lock the door, that’s when people complain, because it’s, like, we don’t get any air.”* (Female)
- **Fourth class (freshmen) women in the focus groups indicated they do not like the policy that a female freshman is not allowed to sleep in her room alone when her roommate is gone.**
 - *“I feel like it is stupid. I would be, like, ‘Why should I have to go out of my room and go upstairs and stay in another girl’s room?’ I don’t feel threatened.”* (Female)
 - *“I’m gone all the time. I play sports, so I’m gone almost every weekend, and I wouldn’t really be comfortable with some other girl coming in to sleep in my bed so my roommate could have somebody there.”* (Female)
 - *“You can lock the door anyway, so what difference does it make whether there’s two people or one person [in the room]?”* (Female)
 - *“It’s a hassle if two or three girls are on a trip or something – you have to move all your stuff just to sleep.”* (Female)
- **Fourth class (freshmen) women in the focus groups also indicated that if that policy is in place, it should apply to everyone, or at least all women at the Academy.**
 - *“If you’re going to enforce it for one person, you might as well enforce it throughout the Corps. I know sexual assault normally happens to just females, but if a guy is going to stay in his own room, I don’t understand why he shouldn’t have to switch rooms like we do.”* (Female)

²⁰⁹ Disciplinary time served by marching.

- “[It’s overkill], especially since they only enforce it for plebes [freshmen]. They don’t make the upperclassmen do it.” (Female)

Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

When discussing the subject of reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault, cadets were asked to talk about the following topics: reporting options and decisions, possible reasons for not reporting an incident, their preferred reporting method, and how much trust they have in the reporting system at USMA.

Reporting Options

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that the Academy has given them all the information and/or resources they need should they ever experience an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault.**
 - “In our Plebe Knowledge Book [freshman handbook], we have this whole section on sexual assault, about what to do.” (Female)
 - “We have briefings about the resources that are available to us if we feel like we’ve been harassed or assaulted. The Academy makes sure we know where to go and where we can get help.” (Female)
 - “Every company has a Respect Officer, and this is someone that’s trained to know both avenues that people can go to. ... The intent [of the Respect Officer] is not to hear their problems or to be their counselor; the intent is to point them in the right direction and get them there safely and have their issues dealt with.” (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they have many options for reporting an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault.**
 - “There’s a Respect Officer and an honor representative. There’s also our team leader. So you have a lot of options to report.” (Male)
 - “If there’s something serious, really any person you go to can deal with it. Like if you don’t feel comfortable talking to your Respect Rep, you can go to any upperclassman or you can go to your TAC [tactical officer]. If it’s something serious, it’s going to be dealt with no matter who you go to.” (Male)
 - “You can use your chain of command first and they could send it up to the CPD [Center for Professional Development] people. You can call the CPD people yourselves. You could talk to the emergency hotline if there was something

really serious and you didn't want anyone to know. The chaplain is always open." (Female)

- **Some fourth class (freshmen) female participants indicated that the Margaret Corbin Forum was an especially helpful resource when it comes to knowing how to report an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault.**
 - *"We have this female group called Margaret Corbin Forum, and I've heard females talk about their experiences with sexual assault, and just hearing what they had to say, they didn't expect it would have happened either, but they knew what to do and how to combat it ... and I think that's important."* (Female)
 - *"The Margaret Corbin Forum has two retreats, one each semester, and what they do is have a lot of upperclass females talk about their experiences throughout the Academy. A lot of them are graduating. I felt like even through all of our briefings and everything, the time I spent there was more worthwhile. One thing I want to say is that sexual assault is not common here, but it's [also] not reported enough. ... It was really worthwhile to hear about another person's experience and know that you have that support base if that ever did happen to you."* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups knew the difference between restricted and unrestricted reporting, even if they do not always use those exact terms.**
 - *"There's one way [of reporting] where you can actually report to take actions against the person. There's another one where you can just report it to get emotional support and nothing will actually come of it beyond helping you get over it."* (Female)
 - *"Some people have to report it when you tell them, like your company commander, whereas the chaplain or somebody else may just be able to counsel you and not report it if you don't want them to."* (Male)
 - *"Unrestricted is that the person you report to has the ability to tell someone else to give you care, whatever you need. Restricted is confidential."* (Male)
- **Although participants in the focus groups did not always know the names of their Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) or Victim Advocate (VA), they indicated they knew how to contact them.**
 - *"It's on-line on the home page. If you pull up our Internet, our home page has a big, bold sexual assault thing."* (Female)

- *“I know the Sexual Assault Responder is in the CPD [Center for Professional Development] department and they have an emergency line.”* (Female)
- *“In the bathrooms in my company there are posters in the back of the stalls ... and they have contact [numbers] on there.”* (Female)
- *“It’s in every cadet handbook in some way, shape, or form.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they would be more likely to report sexual assault than sexual harassment.**
 - *“I think assault gets reported really well. I think it’s harassment that doesn’t, and that’s usually because there are different levels of severity and in a lot of ways, it’s just two people coming to terms with sexuality and maturing. ... I think a lot of those harassment issues are dealt with one-on-one and [the victims] don’t see a need to make it a legal issue.”* (Male)
 - *“I think there’s a big gray area, but I think it becomes very clear that physical contact, for most people, would be a limit where reporting would be necessary.”* (Female)
 - *“I think with true sexual assault cases, nobody is going to get any crap if they report it.”* (Female)

Reasons for Not Reporting

- **When asked why someone might not report an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault, some participants in the focus groups, especially fourth class (freshmen) women, indicated that it may be because women want to fit in and not call attention to themselves.**
 - *“It’s like high school when people don’t fit in. If someone feels like reporting is going to make them look like a troublemaker to people they want to be friends with, that might be a deterrent for some.”* (Male)
 - *“There’s a need – regardless of whether or not we acknowledge it – there’s a need to be accepted here, because you’re going to school here and you’re going to be an officer here. These are not only your classmates but your colleagues.”* (Female)
 - *“Being male dominant here, females don’t want to be perceived as making waves.”* (Male)

- **Another reason focus group participants indicated why cadets do not report sexual harassment or sexual assault is that the person who files the report might acquire a bad reputation.**
 - *“I think more often if something doesn’t get reported, ... it’s because maybe it’s one of their friends that did it so they don’t want to hurt their reputation or they just don’t want that pinned on them, like they don’t want to be seen as someone who turned someone in for a joke or something like that.”* (Male)
 - *“If it’s somebody in the company who everybody really likes and wouldn’t expect that from, then I would probably think, ‘Well, what would these other people think of me?’ and I probably would try to find some other people who can do something about it [instead of reporting it].”* (Female)
 - *“I don’t think sexual harassment is common here. ... But I think if it would occur, I think this would be a difficult situation to get away from because the mentality here is like, ‘Oh, you turned someone in.’ People look badly upon you for doing the right thing.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated having a bad reputation is a serious problem; a problem that lasts for a long time.**
 - *“You get labeled. ... If you’re the only girl in a squad out at Buckner [field training location], you build a relationship with those guys. And if you become hypersensitive to whatever they say, that bond breaks. ... You’re the girl that’s labeled as ‘You can’t joke with her, you can’t bring up anything about that.’ Then you’ve basically segregated yourself from 85% of the male population here at the Academy.”* (Female)
 - *“[Reputation affects] everything you do. You can’t work on a project unless your partner is willing to work with you and it depends on your reputation. You can’t go anywhere unless the person who has the car is okay with your reputation.”* (Female)
 - *“There was a girl, she graduated now, but she was first sergeant of her company, and she felt a lot of the guys were giving her problems being in that leadership position, and she started complaints about ten guys in the company and to this day, it’s still a joke in her company about her doing that.”* (Female)
- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that students might not report an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault because of the possibility that people would not believe them or would think they exaggerated what happened.**

- *“It depends on the person and depends on what happened, because sexual assault doesn’t have to be the type that you see in the movies where someone’s beaten up beyond belief. ... [Sometimes people have the attitude that] if it’s not that, then maybe it wasn’t assault.”* (Female)
- *“I think it’s a culture thing where if you report someone for sexual harassment, people won’t see it as such a big deal and [might think], ‘You’re blowing it out of proportion, you’re getting this person in trouble ... how could you do that?’”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants also indicated incidents might not be reported because the victim would be worried about getting in trouble for encouraging the incident.**
 - *“One of the girls [speaking at a Margaret Corbin Forum] said that after she reported a guy [for sexual assault], everyone thought that she had brought it on herself.”* (Female)
 - *“I think some people are afraid to come forward [because] they think they may get blamed for it. ... [like if they say], ‘Well we were hanging out and I didn’t tell him to leave right away and he started pulling something and I felt defenseless’ or whatnot.”* (Female)
 - *“Being a plebe [freshman], if someone in your direct chain of command is first being your friend and then you talk back and forth and then they start to hit on you or something, then you feel like you would get in trouble because you encouraged it.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that, in some cases, an incident might not be reported if it was not malicious or the victim did not think the offender deserved a harsh punishment.**
 - *“Sometimes the guy’s just dumb. Legitimately he just made a mistake and he was just being stupid and I don’t think that a kid deserves to have his career and reputation demolished because he was just dumb.”* (Female)
 - *“Things get blown out of proportion. If you report it, you feel like [the offender] is going to get 150 hours²¹⁰ or something. That may be stupid and all you want to do is make sure the guy knows that other people know about it, and that he knows it’s just not appropriate.”* (Female)

²¹⁰ Disciplinary time served by marching.

- **A variety of other possible reasons for not reporting an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault were expressed by participants in the focus groups:**
 - The outcome of the case might not be positive for the victim: *“If you’re caught up in a situation where you feel you can’t get out, it’s hard because what if that person doesn’t get kicked out, then you have to live the next four years with that person being here and dealing with that.”* (Female)
 - The victim might not want to become part of the rumor mill: *“USMA is just another version of high school where rumors spread like wildfire. I guess if somebody would report something, a week later people would know about the case and maybe shortly after that they would know who’s involved in the case. So maybe the victim would be reluctant because they know the climate here and that everyone will know immediately.”* (Male)
 - There is a possibility of collateral damage: *“One of my friends was brought up on sexual harassment/assault charges and he was found not guilty by the Conduct Board, but he still got in trouble because he had been drinking previously. So I think people don’t want to come out and say stuff that happened even if it might help somebody else, just because there are so many other consequences they’re going to get in trouble for.”* (Male)
 - It is difficult for a freshman to report something if the offender is an upperclassman: *“Our TAC [tactical officer] talked to us about it. There was a firstie [senior] who had been talking on IM [instant messenger] [to a freshman]. Friendly chatting turned into him hitting on her and showing up in her room and it got to the point where an inappropriate thing happened that was way over the line. So I don’t know how that developed. She could have easily gone to her chain of command and said something, but I don’t think it’s so easy when you’re in that situation.”* (Female)

Reporting Decision and Preferred Reporting Method

- **When asked what they would do if they were to experience an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault, focus group participants indicated that they would first discuss it with a friend, chaplain, or some other confidential resource.**
 - *“[Friends or a chaplain] are less threatening probably.”* (Male)
 - *“I would probably go to an upperclassman who was in a club with me or somebody who is a friend.”* (Female)
 - *“They [recently] made it so a friend could be a restricted source, as well as a doctor, and I think that was a positive change.”* (Female)

- *“I think I feel more comfortable with the unofficial or the restricted way with the chaplain because I’ve heard stories about an officer who just kind of blew it off and said [the victim] was blowing it out of proportion, so I just wouldn’t know who exactly would take me seriously.”* (Female)
- *“I think you would always first just want to go to the sort of resource where you just talk about it first, and then, of course you have that [option] to go the other route after that.”* (Female)
- **After talking to friends and/or a chaplain, some participants in the focus groups indicated that they would talk to their team leader or someone else in their cadet chain of command. Fourth class (freshmen) focus group participants appeared to be especially likely to do so.**
 - *“If someone says something and they wouldn’t stop, instead of going all the way up the chain of command, I would probably tell my team leader, because that’s our next higher-up and then just say, ‘Corporal, he’s not stopping and it really offends me,’ and have him deal with it instead of it going all the way up.”* (Female)
 - *“It could depend on what classes are involved. If you have a firstie [senior] who’s doing something that offends a plebe [freshman], then the plebe is not going to confront him about it. She’s going to maybe go to her team leader and ask the team leader to talk to the firstie.”* (Male)
 - *“If it’s just a guy telling a joke ... I’m the type of person who will say something and I’m pretty sure if I say something it won’t continue so there’s no need for me to report anything. But if they try to take it to the next level, like really disrespect me, I might have to take it to the next level also. Following my chain of command, I would tell my team leader first, but depending on how I feel, if I felt like it was really major, I might take it higher up. If I feel like my team leader wouldn’t get it done the way I wanted to.”* (Female)
- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that they would go to their tactical officer about an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault, but others would not.**
 - *“I think almost any cadet would have [a tactical officer] that they know well enough and trust enough to go to.”* (Male)
 - *“[I would be least likely to talk to a tactical officer], especially if they’re male. My TAC [tactical officer] is a woman, so it might be different. And she was a cadet, so she would be able to relate to what it was like here. But for a male TAC, no.”* (Female)

- *“If it was a good tactical officer, maybe you would go to him, but if it’s someone you know who has a personality that shows they’re obviously not going to help you, I wouldn’t go to them. It just depends on the person.”* (Female)
- *“It depends on how your TAC and you [get along]. I know some people who hate their TACs and wouldn’t go to them.”* (Male)

Trust in Reporting System

- **Although they have not had much experience dealing with the reporting system, fourth class (freshmen) participants in the focus groups indicated they generally trust that incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault would be handled appropriately.**
 - *“I have absolute confidence that any of the upperclassmen that I went and talked to about this, if I told them what happened, I have no doubt that they would in a heartbeat flip around and tell their next-line supervisor, because you can’t get caught in the middle of that and not tell, or else.”* (Male)
 - *“The chain of command usually steps in if it’s a problem. I know one plebe [freshman] girl, her team leader was hitting on her, apparently, so then she just told her chain of command and they gave her another team leader. That’s fine. They fixed it.”* (Female)
 - *“If you compare what’s happening here to other schools, the system is so much more effective here. ... (At other schools) all you do is go and report it and action may happen or it may not. Here you know something will happen and they will be reprimanded for their actions.”* (Female)
- **Upperclassmen participants in the focus groups indicated mixed feelings about how well the system works, especially when reporting sexual assault.**
 - *“One of my teammates got brought up on sexual assault, and it was like the girl’s third time getting in trouble for sex in the barracks or something like that, and she said that he sexually assaulted her, but he was not found [guilty] on sexual assault for that, so I think the system is working in that aspect.”* (Female)
 - *“[Justice would be done] because everything is in place that needs to be. The people you need to go to are there. The steps are all there.”* (Female)
 - *“I think there’s a lot more punishment towards the guy than the girl ... and sometimes it’s both people’s fault.”* (Female)

- **One concern about the system indicated by focus group participants was that women can use it as a scapegoat if they get caught having consensual sex in the dormitories.**
 - *“From upperclassmen I actually heard of three separate cases where females would get kicked out of the Academy for consensual sex in the barracks, but by claiming rape, whether it gets turned down, denied or not, no matter what, as long as they claim rape at the first scene of the crime, they get immunity and they can’t get kicked out for it.”* (Male)
 - *“I’ve seen it used against people, like someone’s accusing someone wrongly and then the system doesn’t really work to free them of guilt because it’s like they automatically go to the victim as the righteous one, I guess. I’ve seen it used in the wrong way to pretty much ruin people’s lives.”* (Female)
- **Some focus group participants expressed the concern that the punishment for sexual harassment is too severe.**
 - *“When a girl does report a guy here, I guess because they want to avoid bad publicity and make an example out of that person, they give them a ridiculous punishment, more than if you had sex in the barracks or Alcohol Board or something more serious.”* (Female)
 - *“Someone sent out an e-mail and got room restriction and like a hundred hours²¹¹ and that’s just ridiculous.”* (Female)

Training

During the discussion on training, USMA cadets in the focus groups were asked to give their opinions on the most and least effective methods of training on the topics of sexual harassment and sexual assault. They also gave feedback on the amount of training currently being conducted, and how they feel training could be improved at USMA.

Amount and Implications of Training

- **Focus group participants indicated that they receive too much training on sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“In terms of the sexual assault stuff, they kind of, like, force it down our throats all the time, and after a while you’re just, like, ‘Yeah, this is the same brief.’ In one ear and out the other kind of thing.”* (Female)

²¹¹ Disciplinary time served by marching.

- *“I think we get over-briefed.”* (Male)
- *“I think we have way too many briefings in the beginning, because it starts to be a joke. Everyone’s, like, ‘We’re having a briefing.’ ‘Sexual harassment?’ ‘Probably.’”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that issues presented in training are frequently restated.**
 - *“It’s just the same thing being presented multiple, multiple times. ... Like ‘Don’t sexually assault or harass somebody and there are these avenues for help if you’ve been assaulted or harassed.’”* (Female)
 - *“We have to do so many hours on the same topics, and they’ve changed our Military Science classes around, so a lot of stuff we learned in PMEE [Professional Military Ethic Education] we [already] learned in our plebe [freshman] year in the Military Science class.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated a concern that the severity of the issues regarding sexual harassment and assault could be compromised with an excess amount of training.**
 - *“I’ve noticed that the vast amount of respect and sexual harassment classes that we have actually belittles how serious the issue is. Because it is a serious issue, but when we have class after class it makes cadets kind of, what’s the word, pessimistic ... or desensitized ... or cynical.”* (Male)
 - *“The more sessions we have, the more cynical people get.”* (Female)
 - *“I think [the training] is overdone. There are too many and people are no longer sensitive to the subject. People are, like, ‘We have to go to another sexual assault briefing.’ I know that’s how I felt this morning when I had to come here.”* (Female)

Professional Military Ethics Education Classes

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that a majority of their sexual harassment and sexual assault training is done in their Professional Military Ethics Education (PMEE) classes.**
 - *“The PMEE classes are all value classes. The Army really does try to continue to teach you those values of respect and honesty and stuff like that, so we get hit over the head with those ideas a lot, whether or not they’re specifically talking*

about sexual harassment and assault, or they're just talking about generally being a good person and a good officer.” (Female)

- **Focus group participants indicated that discussions were more effective than lectures when it comes to learning about sexual harassment and sexual assault in their Professional Military Ethics Education (PMEE) classes.**
 - *“I think what they're doing is pretty effective. We basically have discussions kind of like this when we go to those classes. They'll present a case or something and just a hypothetical situation then they'll ask a discussion question and we just talk about it as a group. You hear what other people think, so if you had wrong ideas about how you would deal with it or you just didn't have the best ideas, you [may] hear someone else say it and you think, ‘Oh, that's a lot better idea. I should probably use that as my guideline for dealing with these things.’” (Male)*
 - *“I think it's a lot better when there are group discussions, because it targets more of what other people think and their values. Somebody says something and you can either agree or disagree with it. ... It's not like there's only one set opinion or anything. So it helps everyone else grow in their values.” (Female)*
 - *“The only good PMEE [Professional Military Ethics Education] class I had this year was before spring break, on partying. We expected the officer to recite FMs [Field Manuals] and doctrines and whatever, ... [but] she was like, ‘Let's talk about sex. Let's talk about drugs. We all know you're going to do it during break.’ And she was more personal and she was like, ‘Let's figure out how we can do this more responsibly.’” (Female)*
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they would rather have a cadet than an officer be in charge of the Professional Military Ethics Education (PMEE) classes when discussing sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“We usually want an upperclassman [because] they talk straight to you instead of treating you like a plebe [freshman] or something. You take them seriously. ... They give you the impression that it's something that's very important that they care about so we should care about it as well.” (Male)*
 - *“The officers usually take over, at least from what I've noticed. They're always like, ‘Here's my two cents,’ and we end up listening to them on their soapbox about what it was like when they were in the Army, ... and the cadet just stands there.” (Female)*
 - *“My company had a [diversity] class one time – an officer came in and he was supervising the class, but he ended up talking at us the whole time. And people*

would try to give their opinion but then he would be like basically, 'You're wrong and you don't need to say that.'" (Female)

- “I think the best classes are the ones where the officers aren't there because then you can be more candid and not say the textbook answer. It's more personal and you can say what you want and you know your peers will be honest too.” (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that it is important for the cadet in charge to be well trained and interested in the subjects of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - “It's a lot about what the cadet who is in charge of it makes out of it. They can just talk and drone on and it won't mean anything to you, but we played diversity football one time, and that sounds like a weird idea, but I know I'll remember that.” (Female)
 - “A lot of times they have the Mentorship Program doing it, so you have somebody who's really uninterested teaching it to a class who's really uninterested in listening, so between the two of them, it's just kind of a train wreck.” (Female)
 - “I think it's extremely difficult to teach Professional Military Ethics Education to anybody that's close to being your peer. I'm only 20 and I have half the yearling class [sophomores] and some plebes [freshman] are older than I am. And some of them have combat experience and some of them have been to college before, and I think it's extremely difficult for anybody at our level, whether it's a plebe [freshman] or firstie [senior], to stand up to somebody and ... give a 45 minute discussion on something we technically have never experienced.” (Female)
- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that they have had negative experiences in their Professional Military Ethics Education (PMEE) training on sexual harassment and sexual assault, including one second class (junior) cadet who taught a class.**
 - “They are mostly a waste of time because it's just the same thing reiterated over and over again.” (Female)
 - “We've had classes on sexual assault and sexual harassment but we can't remember any of them. I think that shows that the classes are pretty much ineffective.” (Female)

- “No one wants to be in there. Everyone is just, like, ‘When is this going to be over?’ and they’re looking at the clock. ... PMEE is just thought of negatively no matter what the topic is.” (Female)
- “I recently taught a PMEE class. I went to an hour briefing during lunch on sexual harassment. We sat there and had a whole bunch of Academy-approved crap shoved down our throats, and then we had to regurgitate it the next week to the plebes [freshman]. It was just, like, not ours. It was not something we owned, it’s something the Academy makes us do. ... I know what they’re trying to do. They’re trying to standardize the PMEE experience, but when you try and do that, you’re not passing on what actually needs to be passed on, which is real life.” (Female)

Most Effective Training Methods

- **When asked to describe training sessions which they found to be most effective, focus group participants mentioned speakers who presented real life experiences. A rape victim who spoke to fourth class (freshman) cadets made an especially strong impression.**
 - “You hear about it and you know what the definition of the word is, but when you actually see someone who has gone through it who has personal experience with it, you see emotion, you see feelings, and it relates a lot better than just words.” (Female)
 - “I think the biggest thing that had an impact on me and probably had an impact on everyone else was having the rape victim come out and speak to us. That really drove it home. She brought a face to it and that really brought it home for a lot of us.” (Male)
 - “We had one girl come who was raped and she gave a huge speech that was, like, really good, and it affected everyone. We were in shock.” (Female)
 - “You could have heard a pin drop with all 1300 of us in the room.” (Female)
- **Focus group participants who saw the “stop sign actors”²¹² indicated that their presentation was effective.**
 - “We had these two professional actors come in, a man and woman, and they kind of did ad lib, acted out different dating scenarios. It was fun. It was interactive ... I thought it brought really great issues to light. And they didn’t

²¹² A production group.

bring up any black and white issues. It was all the gray stuff and everyone's like, 'Yeah, that could have gone either way. It was both their faults.' I thought that was pretty good." (Male)

- *"A guy and a woman were creating a scene where it was a guy and a girl and they were interacting and we got to vote on what they did. Sometimes they put it in the direction of sexual harassment, sometimes they put it in the direction of sexual assault, and we all had to make the call as to what to do. It was fun, it was entertaining. The guys were very, very into their roles and their character and I thought that was probably one of the best ones I saw."* (Female)
- **Fourth class (freshmen) participants in the focus groups indicated that they liked learning about sexual harassment and sexual assault in their psychology classes because it gives them a different perspective than they get in their Professional Military Ethics Education (PMEE) classes.**
 - *"Some classes are specifically about gender roles and interpersonal relationships, so you realize why there are certain perceptions and you understand the effect of stereotypes and harassment and stuff like that, how that perpetuates. You see the cycle from the beginning to the end. In the PMEE [Professional Military Ethics Education] class, they say if the end product happens you're going to get hit, but they don't explain how you can nip it in the bud."* (Male)
 - *"It seems like they're beating a dead horse with the [training sessions] we get now, because we all know this stuff and we know not to do it. They're just reiterating it again and again, whereas we really need to know how to keep other people from doing it, and that's what we get out of psychology."* (Male)
- **Fourth class (freshmen) women in the focus groups indicated they liked having informal discussions about sexual harassment and sexual assault with upperclassmen.**
 - *"Our upperclassmen, the women in our company, took us, the plebe [freshmen] women, and just spoke to us about where to go if we need to talk to them if something happens."* (Female)

Least Effective Training Methods

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that PowerPoint briefings were one of the least effective ways to present training on the topics of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**

- *“I could run you through every sexual harassment briefing I’ve been through, and it’s a standard formula. ... There’s the obligatory slide that has every single phone number, and confidential sources.”* (Male)
- *“The USCC [United States Corps of Cadets] knows that the PowerPoint slides are boring lectures to us. They need to be innovative and creative when they teach.”* (Male)
- *“[During the PowerPoint presentation] you just sit there and wonder, ‘When is it going to be done?’”* (Male)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that PowerPoint briefings were boring and suspected that their main purpose was to fulfill training obligations.**
 - *“A lot of times the PowerPoint stuff comes across to me like they are checking the box so they’re not liable. ... Then they can say, ‘Look what we did. We talked to them about it. It’s their fault.’”* (Male)
 - *“The higher ups are, like, ‘Look at what we’re doing to help this problem,’ but it’s not really helping. It’s something, which is better than nothing. But I don’t think it’s a right solution. I think it’s a waste of time.”* (Female)
- **Both male and female focus group participants indicated that targeting men as “the bad guys” made any type of training ineffective.**
 - *“The guys here are tired of it. They feel antagonized most of the time. My male cadet friends say, ‘Yeah, we’re the bad ones. We’re always going to be the ones accused of sexual harassment and that’s why we don’t really deal with female cadets or that’s why we don’t approach them.’ ... So I guess to a point the training is working, but to another point, it’s becoming too overbearing or whatever on the guys. They just feel personally attacked.”* (Female)
 - *“I don’t think the crowd that you’re dealing with receives it well when males are always painted as the bad guy. That doesn’t help anybody try to fix the problem. It’s like, ‘We’re getting persecuted again.’ It almost feels like reverse discrimination at times.”* (Male)
 - *“If you want to change the situation, not just the system or the reporting or the disciplinary action, if you want to change the actual mentality behind what cadets think about sexual assault and harassment, it needs to be portrayed as a ‘we’ issue, not a guys versus girls issue.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants also indicated several other aspects of training impaired effectiveness:**

- Making women feel helpless: “[One speaker] targeted females and it seemed like he was telling us we were helpless and there wasn’t anything we can do ... and the guys need to protect us from it ...and I don’t feel like that at all.” (Female)
- Training during the freshman summer experience: “You don’t process anything in Beast.²¹³ You’re just like a zombie. You haven’t slept. You’re not used to it. You’re getting yelled at right before lecture. You know you’re going to get yelled at right after lecture, and then they throw this supposedly profound speaker in.” (Female)
- Presenting XY cases²¹⁴ without discussion: “I don’t like those Cadet X and Y cases for the same reason I don’t like the way they teach ethics here in general, because they’ll present the case and say, ‘Cadet X did so and so to Cadet Y and this is why it’s wrong,’ rather than saying, ‘Cadet X did this to Cadet Y, what do you think?’ There’s no thought on our part.” (Male)

Suggested Training Options

- **Given a choice, focus group participants indicated they would like fewer briefings on sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - “It’s a serious subject, so have less classes and maybe we’ll take it more seriously.” (Male)
- **Focus group participants also indicated they would like to eliminate some PowerPoint presentations in favor of something more personal and engaging.**
 - “It’s not right, but as cadets, you have so much to deal with all at the same time and those kinds of briefings, sitting in an auditorium, really don’t work. I think if you want to train, it needs to be something different than just sitting in the classroom or a briefing.” (Male)
 - “The only PMEE [Professional Military Ethics Education] class I can really remember is one where this officer took us outside and we went for a walk through USMA and we went and looked at that little statue. But we talked as we walked. So it was very informal and it kind of made everyone relaxed because we were outside doing something different.” (Female)

²¹³ First year summer cadet basic training.

²¹⁴ XY cases are case studies discussed in Professional Military Ethics Education (PMEE) and leadership classes.

- “A group could get together and meet in Grad. Or we have the reg rooms [regiment rooms], regular mess hall, food hall tables, but it’s enclosed. [They could] have a company or a platoon get in there and talk about the subjects while they’re eating.” (Female)
- **Regarding Professional Military Ethics Education (PMEE) classes, participants in the focus groups suggested restructuring them so they are more informal and discussion-based.**
 - “I think there needs to be more open dialogue. ... You can’t really play the devil’s advocate or have an argument about it [now]. All we do when we talk about it is basically either agree with what they tell us or not say anything.” (Male)
 - “I think it would be better if the PMEE classes we have were a lot looser. I’ve had to teach PMEE classes and when you do, they give you, ‘This is what you’re going to say and these are the questions you’re going to ask.’ I think if it was just looser and we just talked among each other, maybe if we just had someone there to keep us on track or to actually make us talk, I think that would be better.” (Male)
 - “Some of the best PMEE classes I’ve had are the ones where they’ve taken the laundry list of things we’re supposed to cover and thrown it out the window and said, ‘Here’s the broad topic. What do you guys think?’” (Male)
- **Fourth class (freshmen) participants in the focus groups indicated that they tend to feel insulated from many things that happen at the Academy on a day-to-day basis. They would like to hear from upperclassmen about the kinds of sexual harassment and sexual assault situations that happen on campus, and the best way to deal with these situations.**
 - “Plebes [freshman] are, like, at the bottom. Everybody is just trying to be focused on staying out of trouble, like focusing on school work and stuff like that. With the upperclassmen, when you get to your junior and senior year, they’re allowed to drink and go out and everything, and there’s a lot more socialization.” (Female)
 - “Upperclassmen will talk about [the fact that] when you become a cow [junior] and firstie [senior], USMA is a completely different place. You see a lot more stuff. There’s a lot of politics and just a lot of stuff that you don’t see as a plebe [freshman], even as a yuk [sophomore]. So I think maybe if we get former cadets or older cadets to come in and talk about actual experiences with sexual assault or harassment, we could see that, yeah, it does happen.” (Female)

- *“Maybe they can do something involving the plebes [freshmen], because plebes feel uncomfortable dealing with issues with upperclassmen. Maybe they could specifically create something for them, like a resource to turn to if they had a situation like that.”* (Female)
- **Some participants in the focus groups suggested that the Academy stop associating harassment with assault and treat it as a respect issue instead.**
 - *“We have a million briefs on sexual assault and I think the problem can be addressed better if you take some of the sexual assault briefs and turn them into maybe like a respect thing, like social skills or whatever, because I think we have less problems with sexual assault than we do with sexual harassment.”* (Female)
 - *“Instead of making it a defined sexual harassment policy, make it a respect people policy. Because like sexual jokes and stuff, it doesn’t bother a lot of people, but some it does. But that’s kind of how it is with everything. I think when you separate sexual harassment from everything else, you kind of create a barrier [between the genders].”* (Male)
 - *“I think you can take a lot of the stigma off sexual harassment because that seems to be a much larger problem than assault, so stop associating it with assault. You have this range from rape to saying an inappropriate joke and they’re always linked together and they’re viewed as one thing. Yeah, you may have said an inappropriate joke but it’s pretty much the same thing as raping someone. That’s the message we get by always having assault and harassment together.”* (Male)
- **When asked if the material covered in the sexual harassment and sexual assault training should be graded, focus group participants overwhelmingly indicated no.**
 - *“It would just be something else for everybody to complain about.”* (Female)
 - *“It would just make people more cynical about it. It would undermine any actual effort toward change.”* (Female)
- **A variety of other suggestions were given by participants in the focus groups regarding how to improve the training they receive on sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - Use more real life examples: *“To me [the training sessions] seem really impersonal and really, really general, so maybe relating it to what happens here at the Academy would be a better idea, as opposed to just somebody getting up*

and talking about the laws that the UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] has against rape and sexual assault.” (Female)

- Train in Military Science classes instead of Professional Military Ethics Education [PMEE] classes: *“I think what turns a lot of people off [about PMEE classes] is that they are in the middle of our day, always right after lunch. We’re more interested in taking a nap after lunch than going into another boring class that we’ve been sitting through the last four years. I think if we just took a Military Science day to do it, we have to go to our Military Science class anyway, we could incorporate that into our Military Science class and it’s not an additional 55 minutes of my time that you’re taking.” (Female)*
- Have mixed company training sessions: *“A lot of times we’re all with our classmates from our companies, and amongst the women and men in my company we have a bond and a trust so it’s funny to get these value classes when we would never hurt each other. I wonder if more mixed company PMEE training might be more effective because you’re bringing in other people’s training and other people’s experiences.” (Female)*
- Communicate results of focus groups so men and women can see how each other feel as a group: *“It’s easy for one person to say, ‘This offends me’ or ‘This doesn’t offend me,’ but when it’s a larger consensus of people, [cadets] would get a sense of what everybody is feeling. I think that’s a lot more powerful than one person standing up and saying, ‘Look this really offends me.’” (Female)*
- Set the right tone for new students: *“[We need to] set a groundwork that everyone is exposed to when they enter the Academy. You set a tone that says this is something that we are taking time out of our training schedules to address and it’s important to us, making sure that it’s delivered in an appropriate way that shows it is incredibly important, not ‘I’ve got to teach this class on sexual harassment so we can get done in five minutes,’ but ‘This is something that’s important to our institution and will be important when you have soldiers of every gender and every creed in your unit.’” (Female)*
- Clarify the rationale for training: *“I think there needs to be a change of perception, because a lot of people think we have sexual harassment and assault education and door locking policies and things because of the women, not because of what men are necessarily doing. In my opinion, that’s the perception is that we have to have all these levels of instruction and rules and things like that because the women are here, not because there’s a problem. I think that that really needs to change. ... I think there needs to be more introspection on [the men’s] part rather than just perceiving it as a problem because [us women are] here.” (Female)*

Leadership Preparation

After talking about training in general, cadets were asked to think about their future role as an officer, and discuss how well they are being trained to deal with sexual harassment and sexual assault in a leadership capacity.

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that the wide range of experiences they receive at the Academy goes a long way toward preparing them for dealing with sexual harassment and sexual assault as a leader.**
 - *“If the situation comes up [here at the Academy], you see how the chain of command handles it. So if something happens, like privacy is breached or something, you kind of know, ‘Okay, well if it happens with my people, I won’t do that.’ You see how to react and treat them and make them not feel like such a victim.”* (Female)
 - *“One thing that’s helpful is that sometimes when we’re back from PMEE [Professional Military Ethics Education] class everyone’s complaining about it, like the hour after the class, and so your teacher will talk about it. [The teacher is] an actual officer in the Army most of the time so they’ll talk about things that they’ve had to deal with and that kind of [tells us that] okay, this does happen, they’re not going to waste our time. It kind of just reinforces the fact that [harassment] does happen and it needs to be addressed and people need to discuss it so people are aware of what’s going on.”* (Male)
 - *“I think what we get here will make us overly sensitive to [handling it out in the field]. One thing I noticed when I did go out to Army was that [sexual harassment] was definitely a lot less taboo than they make it sound here, so I think a lot of us would be able to deal with it a lot easier than we might perceive since we’re here.”* (Male)
 - *“We go through so many classes from the second we walk in the door. We know how to handle it. It’s not that hard to go through the certain procedures that you have to go through. But I think we’re trained enough on an emotional way to handle it.”* (Female)
 - *“I think every day being in this environment [teaches you things]. I think your experiences that you have every day for four years, ... that package of four years, is going to help you when you get out there.”* (Female)
- **Some participants in the focus groups gave examples of specialized training they have had at the Academy which has been effective in terms of teaching them how to handle sexual harassment and sexual assault as an officer or leader.**

- “[We’ve had one or two briefs] on sexual harassment with the troops – how they deal with it – and respect issues with your troops.” (Male)
- “In our psychology class we covered a lesson dealing with sexual assault as, like, leaders in a unit or whatever – how to address the problem and how to prevent it. It was pretty effective because they gave real-life scenarios and we were supposed to come up with some type of plan.” (Female)
- “There is a female group and they have speakers come in that you can voluntarily go to, and that’s an opportunity for you to ask, ‘How do you deal with being a platoon leader of a platoon of all males and one female?’ Those are the things that you kind of have to pursue on your own. ... You have to kind of put a little effort into it. They’re not going to force feed you.” (Female)
- “The most knowledge I’ve learned is from female officers who have given their experiences. ... In my Combatives class, it’s like an all-female class, so my instructor was telling us about her real life PL [platoon leader] experiences. And because it was all female we were getting this female perspective. That’s not a lot of what you hear at Buckner [field training location]. So we heard, ‘Yes, I was in these situations and yes, I had to deal with it.’ For me, that was more knowledge than being in class with your classmates where half of them want to leave.” (Female)
- **Although many focus group participants indicated they already felt prepared to deal with sexual harassment and sexual assault as a leader, some would like additional training on that topic.**
 - “When we’re a lieutenant, a lot of the problems we’re going to have to deal with in our platoon, as opposed to going to the next person in the chain of command. So I think it would be a good idea in the PMEE [Professional Military Ethics Education] classes to have suggestions on how to solve, or at least partially eliminate, the problem on your own, as opposed to just telling someone [at the next level].” (Female)
 - “We need to increase the number of women officers on the faculty [so we can] provide mentors and role models, the women who can show by example how they dealt with these issues in the Army.” (Female)
 - “I think one of the important things is that they need to start couching the training as more of, ‘This is something you might deal with as an officer, as a leader.’ Because initially it looks like they’re saying to the individual male cadets, ‘Hey, you guys shouldn’t do this,’ and most women take offense to that because they feel like they’re being personally attacked when it really should be addressed more as a leadership issue.” (Female)

- *“I think we really didn’t get any opportunity to talk to someone about how we as female officers can deal with this in our units if it happens to our soldiers or between our soldiers or in our unit or whatever we’re commanding, and how we would deal with that, who we would go to, the real process of it in the Army. I don’t feel totally prepared for that I guess.”* (Female)
- *“They don’t really say what you’re supposed to do as a platoon leader if, let’s say, someone says so-and-so was sexually assaulted or sexually harassed. At least I don’t recall them saying.”* (Male)

Communication From the Academy

During the USMA focus groups, cadets were asked to evaluate the communication currently provided by the Academy on sexual harassment and sexual assault. They were also given a chance to voice their opinions on how communication from the Academy could be improved.

Current Communication About Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they received general information from the Academy about sexual harassment and sexual assault, but very little information about specific cases.**
 - *“They give us all the statistics about how particularly sexual assault is on the rise. ... But they don’t tell you anything about it. You never hear anything about it except for big cases. ... [They’ll say] ‘Sexual assault is about 10 percent this year but we’re not going to tell you anything about it other than that.’”* (Male)
 - *“They try to actively shield us.”* (Female)
 - *“They post all the cases that were brought up at Honor and Respect Boards on the USCC [United States Corps of Cadets] home page. There’s a link to get there. So you can click on it. It doesn’t give us names or specifics, but it just tells what the incident was and what the punishment was.”* (Male)
 - *“We had a briefing a while ago with the Com [Commandant] about, like, all the various boards and areas where people got in trouble. And you hear about it every once in a while from your chain of command or just in passing. ... [They say] we had 13 alcohol boards or sexual harassment stuff, but we never really hear the whole [story]. ... Maybe if someone knew this person got in trouble for saying that joke and they really got hours for that, maybe ... that would help.”* (Male)

- “We get five e-mails a day from [the safety officer] who will tell us about how all these different soldiers were injured in car crashes and stuff, but we never hear anything at all about this sexual assault that happened last year.” (Male)
- **If an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault occurred within a cadet’s company, however, focus group participants indicated they would sometimes receive specific information about it from their company officer.**
 - “If it happens to somebody in your company, the TAC [tactical officer] will tell the company just to dispel rumors.” (Female)
 - “Our TAC told our company what was going on in the company to try to dispel any rumors going around, to try to set the facts [straight], and try to make it a learning lesson for everyone, not just the person or people involved.” (Male)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they sometimes relied on the rumor mill for information about specific incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - “I know it’s a privacy issue ..., but mostly we just hear rumors. We’ve had classmates who have gotten kicked out for, like, sexual assault, but to me that’s all rumor. We don’t know the facts of the case. We don’t know what happened, how it happened, where, when, if there was alcohol involved. ... That’s kind of a problem.” (Female)
 - “No one really comes out and tells us what happened, but you kind of hear it.” (Female)

Desired Communication About Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

- **Without compromising the confidentiality of those students involved in cases, participants in the focus groups indicated they would like to receive specific information about cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault (or even the other Academies), including what happened and the consequences.**
 - “It might be valuable because [as freshmen] we’re sheltered and I didn’t even realize the things that occur of that nature, so I guess it would make me more aware that it is an issue. ... and more conscious of what was going on around me.” (Female)
 - “I think it’s a problem [that] a lot of cadets think it doesn’t happen here. So [telling about specific cases] would make it more, like, ‘Okay, yes, it does happen here.’” (Female)

- *“It would show the guys where their boundaries are without testing them.”*
(Female)
- *“I think that if there are instances and situations where it happens, they should tell us in, like an XY case.²¹⁵ Anything so it justifies why we’re doing all this, so then people won’t get annoyed.”* (Female)
- *“Any more real-time examples, even from other Academies would be helpful.”*
(Male)
- **Receiving specific information about cases after the fact would be acceptable to focus group participants, as long as they hear it before it gets out to their parents and the general public.**
 - *“The gag orders are in place to protect the victim and the innocent-until-proven-guilty aggressor. So that’s why information is not put out. But after the fact, after those cases are closed and solved, would be appropriate times to let us know the facts of certain cases.”* (Male)
 - *“We don’t hear about the stuff that goes on as far as sexual assault cases. I think we should be told what happened, what’s going on, rather than [hearing about it from our parents].”* (Female)
- **Some focus group participants indicated they would like to hear the results, or more detailed results, of sexual harassment and sexual assault surveys.**
 - *“I think if they’re going to do all these studies, they should be more up front with what the results are, because I know apparently that survey we took last year, it came out that USMA was the worst Academy of all of them and this is after the fact and I had no idea about that, and my mom’s like, ‘Oh yeah, I just saw it on the news.’”* (Female)
 - *“If they’re going to make us come to these types of things and fill out surveys, it’s common courtesy, I think, for them to let us know what the results are.”*
(Female)
 - *“One survey kind of bugged me in that everyone has their own definition of sexual harassment, and the way I felt the survey was is, ‘Have you ever heard this?’ ... and then never asking if you’ve been specifically harassed, and then going on and saying 90-something percent of women have been harassed, where we don’t define our own definition.”* (Female)

²¹⁵ XY cases are case studies discussed in Professional Military Ethics Education (PMEE) and leadership classes.

Alcohol

The topic of alcohol was discussed in the USMA focus groups because it typically plays a significant role in situations involving sexual harassment and sexual assault. After discussing that role, cadets gave their opinions on why alcohol is used and the effectiveness of current alcohol policies. Cadets were also asked to evaluate the alcohol training provided by the Academy.

Role of Alcohol in Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Incidents

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated agreement that alcohol plays a significant role in situations involving sexual misconduct, especially sexual assault.**
 - *“People are less reserved when they’ve been drinking. I’ve never experienced it here, but just in life you see that people don’t hold back and they act like they normally wouldn’t, so it gives them more opportunity to head in the wrong direction.”* (Female)
 - *“The only time sexual assault does happen here it is related to alcohol. When someone gets drunk they lose their inhibitions then something happens that normally would never happen.”* (Female)
 - *“When you look at the statistics as to relating intoxication to sexual assault, that’s pretty high, and I think that maybe other things, not just sexual assault, should be focused on, [like] a pervasive drinking problem among people our age.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that one of the main issues with alcohol involvement is that it creates problems in determining facts about the guilt or innocence of the people involved in a case of reported sexual assault.**
 - *“The problem a lot of times is, was it really the guy’s fault? Did he really assault her? Did it really happen? Was it mutual at the time and she got drunk, she was guilty?”* (Male)
- **Although alcohol plays a significant role in cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault, focus group participants agreed that it is never an excuse for unacceptable behavior.**
 - *“They tell us that just because you’re impaired with alcohol, that’s no reason to act inappropriately, and you’re still responsible for all your actions even while you’re impaired.”* (Male)

- *“It doesn’t make [the parties involved] less guilty because they should have thought before they did it.” (Female)*
- *“I think people might understand why it happened a little more, but they’re not going to say it’s any more reasonable or any more excusable because some guy was really drunk or something.” (Male)*
- *“Alcohol is never an excuse. ... You’re choosing to drink and, therefore, you’re accepting the consequences of your actions.” (Female)*

Effectiveness of Alcohol Policies

- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that using alcohol is part of Academy culture.**
 - *“We know what’s bad for us and we know we’re not supposed to do it, but we’re at an age where people do it anyway.” (Female)*
 - *“No matter what the restriction, no matter how big the punishment, people are going to find a way to drink.” (Female)*
 - *“It’s because we live in a high stress world. It’s a way to relax and escape from it for a little bit.” (Female)*
- **Some focus group participants indicated that the alcohol policy is too strict.**
 - *“I think it’s restrictive to the point of being almost harmful. ... There is no leeway whatsoever to talk about alcohol in any other context than it is being bad. And [the result of] every single alcohol incident is they’ll break your back, regardless of what you’ve done, if it relates to alcohol, if you were just drinking and you happened to do anything. I understand why they’re trying to do it, but I think the benefit gained is lost by the negative effects of the policy here.” (Male)*
 - *“I think if we were allowed to have [alcohol], it would be less of a problem.” (Female)*
- **Focus group participants indicated that the fact that cadets who are of legal age can only drink two nights a week causes some people to want to drink in excess on those days.**

- *“People don’t get out much on a regular basis, and when they go out on Thursday to the Firstie Club²¹⁶ or something, they’re usually more like binge drinking, not just having one drink. I think it’s a little out of hand just because you’re cooped up in your room and then you only have this one chance to go out, so you’re going to make the most of it.”* (Female)
- *“I think we’re so restrained and restricted ... that when people finally get a chance [to drink] they go crazy.”* (Female)
- *“They create an atmosphere where you can’t have a beer with dinner because you can only drink Thursday or Friday nights, so everyone goes Thursday or Friday night and just drinks all they can. That creates an environment where, because there’s only one place to drink and only one time to drink, everyone drinks and they drink to excess every single week.”* (Male)
- **One complaint voiced in the focus groups about the current alcohol policy was that it does not allow cadets to learn to drink responsibly.**
 - *“They don’t help you learn how to be responsible with alcohol or anything like that; they just, like, ‘Here’s your one day, go for it.’ And they expect us to be responsible when we only have one day of freedom.”* (Female)
 - *“Like even after you get out—like I’ve talked to friends that have graduated, and they’re, like, all the West Pointers that come out, the whole time they’re just crazy; they’re drunk every night and they’re just going out and partying because they finally get away from West Point and get a chance to live their own lives and are out of control.”* (Female)
 - *“The problem is we don’t have the ability to have it as a socialization process.”* (Female)
 - *“If people are scared of getting in trouble with alcohol, they’re not going to learn how to drink maturely most of the time. You see that first year, people that go down and just get obliterated [get drunk] at the Firstie Club or the Yuk Club²¹⁷ because they’re not used to it.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants also indicated that the current alcohol policy is not appropriate because the rules go by class rather than the age of the cadet.**

²¹⁶ The Firstie Club is an on-campus bar for seniors that serves food and beer.

²¹⁷ The Firstie Club is an on-campus bar for seniors that serves food and beer. The Yuk Club is an on-campus facility designed for sophomores.

- *“It sucks for those who are of age but are freshmen and sophomores, I would imagine. But I guess it’s probably good because then it teaches you to hold back, maybe. Except it’s bad because then when you do get to cow year [junior year], you’re ready to bust loose.”* (Female)
- *“[They should] let sophomores who are of age drink on post. ... If you’re of age, I don’t see why not.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that they thought it would be beneficial if they could assist a friend in need without being punished themselves even if the friend is drinking underage or inappropriately.**
 - *“If you are with somebody drinking underage, you get in just as much trouble as they do, even if you’re stone cold sober. That leads to people thinking, ‘I’m going to pretend I didn’t see anything’ and walk away. And that’s how a drunk person might sexually assault somebody or do something.”* (Male)
 - *“I had a roommate that was drinking in the barracks once. A lot of people say I should tell him not to do that. But the fact of the matter is even if I yelled at him, he’s going to go drinking somewhere. He’s of age. He’s going to come back drunk. And from what I saw, it would be better if I stayed with him as a sober person making sure he didn’t do anything stupid rather than have him go someplace where I can’t watch after him and come back drunk and not be supervised.”* (Male)
- **Participants in the focus groups also expressed a desire for more consistent punishments based on the degree of the offense.**
 - *“I know two people who got the same punishment. One of them went down and just drank on the wrong night of the week. That was the only thing he did. He didn’t do anything wrong. And another one went and got drunk and peed in a plebe’s [freshman’s] sink. And they got roughly the same punishment.”* (Male)
 - *“If you do something bad while you’re drinking, [you should] get punished for doing whatever you did, not for drinking. I’m not saying they should allow [underage] people to drink. There’s no institution in the United States that allows people underage to drink. ... But I don’t think they should make it such a taboo issue. Is drinking underage really worse than a lot of the other things that come with far lesser punishments? I don’t think it is.”* (Male)
- **Some focus group participants indicated they would like to have more opportunities to drink on campus.**

- *“I think they should open it up to more often than just the two nights a week at the locations where we’re allowed to drink on post. Everybody goes down there on Thursday night to the single place ... and half of the people are looking to get completely trashed and the other people are just out with their friends, but they’re going to get dragged into getting completely trashed just because the beer is flowing.”* (Male)
- *“When it comes once a week in two hours, you pound as much as you can in two hours because it’s the only chance you’re going to get this week or until the weekend. But if it’s introduced socially at a more adult level, like have a glass of wine with dinner, or have a beer with dinner, you can have a couple drinks tonight sitting here with friends, it’s not like, ‘I have three hours to get tanked.’ It becomes less of a demon.”* (Female)
- *“I think they should take another look at how to solve the problem besides training. It’s a societal problem, so that’s a huge hurdle to deal with, and no matter what we do, I think people are going to drink in excess of what’s reasonable. But some things they’ve done is make it more available in brigade functions and make it more accessible rather than less accessible. I think this kind of de-sensationalizing alcohol has helped some and we can continue that in other ways. We even talked about having alcohol in the mess hall for mandatory meals.”* (Female)

Additional Topics

At the conclusion of each focus group, cadets were given an opportunity to bring up any topic related to sexual harassment or sexual assault. Cadets indicated they were happy to hear that these issues would be brought to the attention of Academy leadership.

- **Some first class (senior) men in the focus groups suggested that the Academy should focus more on teaching values and less on using punishment to prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“Maybe the Academy should focus more on instilling values instead of punishments. I can think of specific cases where someone said a word that a girl found offensive and they were given 80 hours²¹⁸ for it and their behavior did not change because they became so resentful toward the system and they became very cynical that the system didn’t reform them.”* (Male)
 - *“There was an incident—nobody was really hurt in the matter—but someone was given like 80 hours, 100 hours, or 70 hours. Did it really change anything? No.*

²¹⁸ Disciplinary time served by marching.

It just made people think it was a witch hunt for somebody just to say a word that was maybe disrespectful.” (Male)

- **In spite of the emphasis placed on preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault, women in the focus groups indicated that they would like people to know that they feel safe and protected at the Academy.**
 - *“I think it’s important to just remember that the rate [of sexual harassment and sexual assault] is low here. I’m not trying to blame my sex or anything, but we’d have to put ourselves in some compromising situations for some of the things to happen. And everyone comes from different backgrounds so not everyone is going to be your sparkling cadet. But we have the lowest percentage in the country, which is pretty respectable.” (Female)*
 - *“I know you always try to ask us what’s bad and how can it be improved, but there’s a lot of good too. It’s like we go to school with 3,000 big brothers that look after you all the time. I know that if you go out with any of them, like a group of five guys, they’re so overly protective, you feel safe no matter where you’re going. There are really good guys here.” (Female)*
 - *“I think the best thing that we can have is the support system, like we have the commandant’s assistant, having the chaplains, having a chain of command, and people, and officers, and mentors, and sponsors, people that you can trust that, when your personal boundary is crossed and you’re uncomfortable and you feel you can’t take a stand yourself, then you can actually turn to those people and they know the way to help you. Because if you’re a civilian girl at a college and someone sexually harassed you, who would you turn to but your best friend? You don’t have somebody in your school in charge of gender relations. You don’t have a chaplain that’s five minutes away from your room, necessarily. I think that the best thing we have here is that support structure, if people use it and if people know how to use it.” (Female)*
 - *“I think it is a lot better here than any other college. I think you feel a lot more protected here, and I think it’s more of an issue because females recently came here and it’s more in the news, but I think if you compare our college to other colleges, we would have a lower sexual assault and sexual harassment rate. So I think that needs to be kept in perspective. Because when it’s in the news it just looks like the Academies are a bad place to go. But I think you’re safer here than at other colleges.” (Female)*

Chapter 3: U.S. Naval Academy

Eight focus group sessions were conducted at USNA between April 23-26. Each session was scheduled for a 90-minute period. There was one session held for both genders for each class year, each with between eight and thirteen students.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment was one of the main subjects addressed in the *SAGR2007* focus groups at USNA. The purpose of this discussion was to explore midshipmen's views on the type and extent of sexual harassment currently happening at the Academy, possible reasons for sexual harassment, and the level of tolerance for it.

Definition and Examples of Sexual Harassment

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that sexual harassment is any verbal statement or comment that is inappropriate or offensive enough to make someone feel uncomfortable.**
- **When asked to give examples of sexual harassment, male participants in the focus groups tended to think mainly of “off-color jokes” or “joking around,” while female participants indicated a wider variety of verbal situations that could be considered harassment.**
 - *“There are not that many girls here so any kind of jokes about female mids [midshipmen] not being as pretty as civilian girls or being more manly because we come here, things like that would be harassment.” (Female)*
 - *“You’ll walk past and guys will make comments about your white pants. [The white pants] are not cut to be flattering and they don’t hide anything. The guys will point that out.” (Female)*
 - *“I was having a really interesting conversation with some of the guys in my company after lunch. A girl who wasn’t in my company walked by. The guys started talking [about her]. I looked at them both. They were like, ‘What?’ I’m really close with them, but sometimes it shocks me the stuff they say in front of me, even when it’s not about me.” (Female)*
 - *“A month or so ago, a female midshipman was walking out to her car and there were some first class male midshipmen driving in and they stuck their head out*

the window and yelled an inappropriate female phrase like WUBA.²¹⁹ It's a derogatory term for female midshipmen." (Female)

- **After discussing sexual harassment for a time, focus group participants indicated that it does not always have to be verbal, but can take place electronically or in other nonverbal forms.**
 - *"In our company we have a habit where [we e-mail jokes to each other]. One joke started with a girl and a guy. Someone put out a picture that resembled them, like a woodpecker and something else, because they were supposed to be going out. The jokes came back and forth, and eventually the female midshipman felt uncomfortable. She felt harassed because she didn't like that guy." (Male)*
 - *"We have flags hanging out on Fridays [at lunch]. They have like porn star girls on one side and on the other side they have pictures of girls from the school that they get from Facebook [Internet social networking Website]. And they say, 'Do you see the difference here?' They're horrible. We have all male squads in my company and the flags will be on their tables only. Usually they safeguard, they go back and find 2005 or 2006 grads and say this isn't sexual harassment." (Female)*
 - *"In my company we did something called Dear Santa. If you wanted to, you wrote anonymous notes in a box. It was supposed to be, like, funny insults to people. ... You wrote it as another person. An example is 'Dear Santa, can you send me a blanket for Christmas? It's tough to keep warm when I'm cold hearted.' ... A lot of them made me uncomfortable. You could tell it made other people uncomfortable because the laughter would be hesitant. A lot of that got kind of sexual." (Female)*
 - *"There was a Facebook group called 'Top 25' created by some male midshipmen and it ranked the top 25 women at the Academy that they'd like to sleep with. When I heard about that I was very, very upset. And I wasn't even on the list." (Female)*
 - *"When I was a plebe [freshman] my roommate was a very attractive girl. She declined many offers for dates. One of those individuals that was declined was pretty upset by that. And when we had our little plebe [freshman] dance lesson where they line all the females up ... he had a laser pointer and was circling her chest because she was kind of small." (Female)*

²¹⁹ "WUBA" is a derogatory term used at USNA to refer to female midshipmen.

- **Focus group participants indicated that the definition of sexual harassment is somewhat subjective in nature because what is offensive to one person may not be offensive to another. Some participants indicated they are frustrated by this, explaining that they are never totally sure what they can and cannot say.**
 - *“Sexual harassment is a lot grayer than sexual assault. It all depends on the person. A joke could be told at lunch and I might think it’s funny but the girl next to me is offended and, therefore, it can be construed as sexual harassment.”* (Female)
 - *“It depends on the person whether it offends them. There are a lot of people who say, ‘Yeah, you guys can tell whatever jokes you want.’ ... And then there are some who, if you say one thing wrong or make one little implication, will take major offense to it.”* (Male)
 - *“Some people have a really high tolerance and there are [only] a couple of things that set them off. And some people have a low tolerance and most things set them off. You don’t know. ... You’re always walking on eggshells.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated it was a more serious situation when offensive comments were considered sexual harassment and the offender was asked to stop but refused to do so.**
 - *“It’s another person’s right to think or say something that somebody else is not going to agree with. ... If it goes on to be a continuously harassing or degrading situation, it’s a little different.”* (Male)
 - *“One of my very good friends was in a class of all male midshipmen. They were all second class [juniors] and she was a youngster [sophomore]. She would come back from class crying every day. One day her lieutenant asked what was wrong. She said nothing was wrong. After class he talked to her and realized they threw things at her in class. They would go through her books and take her notes. And they were horrible for no reason. When he questioned them about it they said they were just joking. But they weren’t joking. And they continued to do it. The lieutenant said he thought she could put them up for sexual harassment.”* (Female)
- **Although focus group participants indicated it is a rare occurrence, some were aware of a few incidents, including a recent one, where sexual harassment was directed toward a man.**
 - *“I know guys who get offended by some jokes and who’ve come up to me and said ‘Hey, don’t say that stuff anymore.’”* (Male)

- “A girl was walking and talking on her cell phone the other day. First, the guy came up and told her she shouldn’t be doing that because we’re not allowed to walk and talk at the same time in uniform. The girl replied with sexual harassment. [Made a derogatory statement.]” (Male)

Extent of Sexual Harassment on Campus

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that sexual harassment is not something that concerns them on a day-to-day basis.**
 - “It’s an issue but not a huge issue. I think they stress it a lot here and I don’t think it’s as prominent as they make it out to be.” (Female)
 - “There are different levels of it here. For me personally it’s not something I have to deal with.” (Female)
 - “To make a point by not making a point, it’s hard for me to think of many examples of [sexual harassment]. I don’t know if that’s important too.” (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that most potential incidents of sexual harassment are avoided because the offenders stop making inappropriate comments when they are asked to do so.**
 - “If someone said ‘I’m offended by that,’ nine times out of ten the person who said it would apologize and watch what they say more around you.” (Female)
 - “If someone makes it clear they’re offended, people usually respect that.” (Male)
 - “If you say something to somebody they really respect it, especially if a guy is bothering a girl and then another guy says something to him. I think they would listen and respect it.” (Female)
- **According to focus group participants, sexual harassment might either appear to be less of an issue to older students, especially first class (senior) midshipmen, or it might be on the decline.**
 - “We’ve grown up for the past four years with a certain company and everyone is comfortable joking around. [The girls] joke around back. It’s completely different than going to a girl in a different company that no one knows.” (Male)
 - “To me it’s not an issue anymore. I think the climate has gotten a lot more friendly. I don’t see sexual harassment as being that much of a problem. I

don't think about it. When I was a plebe [freshman] I saw a little more. I think in the past three years it's gotten better." (Female)

- **According to focus group participants, upperclassmen also appear to be less tolerant of sexual harassment, when it does occur, than younger students, and are fairly adept at avoiding situations that could be interpreted as sexual harassment.**
 - *"As firsties [seniors] we've kind of isolated ourselves in terms of our friendships, in terms of our jobs. We don't have to go to table [to meals], and a lot of times we don't. We're stronger and we've been here a while. If someone says something offensive, I'll say, 'Hey, I don't like that, don't say it.' It would be the female underclass that would be offended and maybe not say anything."* (Female)
 - *"When I was a plebe [freshman] ... someone said something offensive. I don't remember what it was but I got really angry and I got up and left. I couldn't really say anything back at them. Whereas now if someone says something offensive, I turn to them and say, 'You can't do that.' It just changes every year as you gain more confidence, more ability to talk to people."* (Female)
 - *"A lot of times the upperclass guys are really aware of the [harassment] situation. If they see something wrong with a girl plebe [freshman], they ask an upperclass girl to talk to the girl plebe to avoid [having to correct the girl themselves] so there's no mistake or misconception."* (Female)

Reasons for Sexual Harassment

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that a typical reason comments are made that could be considered sexual harassment is that men simply forget to be careful about what they say.**
 - *"I think one problem is that we're in a professional environment 24/7. You go back to Bancroft Hall [dormitory] and you're expected to act so professionally all the time. But that's tough to do."* (Male)
 - *"You're one of the guys here, they don't think of you as a lady. They don't really screen what they say. They'll say something and they're not meaning to offend you but it's more negative towards women."* (Female)
 - *"Guys tend to give each other a hard time. Sometimes you forget that the girls are still girls. I think at times you can be joking with somebody and be really sarcastic and then not realize that you offend somebody."* (Male)

- **Focus group participants indicated that there is also a sense that some men get carried away in certain situations, and “don’t know when to stop.”**
 - *“I think you have to kind of realize there comes a time you have to cut it off before it goes too far. I think a lot of people here have a problem drawing the line.”* (Male)
- **Female participants in the focus groups indicated that lack of maturity on the part of men is another reason for behavior that can potentially lead to sexual harassment.**
 - *“This is going to sound bad but at the end of day they’re just guys and they’re 19 to 24 and that gives them the maturity level of about 8. So I think they are really just that clueless.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that some men, especially the underclassmen, may make offensive remarks because they feel pressure to “fit in” with their friends and classmates.**
 - *“Some of the girls who want to fit in will tell crude jokes.”* (Female)
 - *“I think a lot of harassment comes when it’s not just one person who is doing it. The person can feel supported by other people, so it’s almost like a gang harassment on someone. It makes it easier for three to go against one person.”* (Male)

Tolerance of Sexual Harassment

- **Female focus group participants indicated that a certain amount of behavior that has the potential to become sexual harassment is tolerated by women because they know the intent is not malicious.**
 - *“I’m friends with all the guys in my company. My neighbor next door makes a joke saying, ‘You’re not a girl, you’re a guy with long hair.’ I laugh it off because I signed up to come here and I knew there weren’t going to be many girls.”* (Female)
 - *“Yesterday I was on CMOD [company mate of the deck] and some person in our company came on deck and stopped for a second. He says, ‘I have never seen your hair that way. For a second I thought there was a cute girl there. Then I knew it was you, so never mind.’ I take that [kind of comment] with a grain of salt.”* (Female)

- **Some women in the focus groups, especially the younger ones, indicated that some potentially offensive behavior is to be expected in a place where women are in the minority.**
 - *“The women here at the Academy have come here with the knowledge that we are a minority and that those kinds of things are going to happen when you’re dealing with guys. Guys are just a different entity than women are.”* (Female)
 - *“We get kind of used to it. If we threw a fit [every time it happened] we’d be throwing fits all the time.”* (Female)
 - *“We come here with the expectation of [males forgetting the females are around]. Maybe I’m out numbered, you sit at a table at lunch and you’re the one of two females maybe. You have the expectation not only for the people around you, so that just makes you okay with it, okay with the jokes.”* (Female)
 - *“We came here knowing we weren’t coming to finishing school or regular college. We were coming to a school dominated by guys. We came here because we’re tough girls that don’t mind getting dirty and working out all the time. We’re not the typical, let’s straighten our hair every morning, and put on a face full of makeup and go to class in our pajamas. We are different than the other girls in our age groups.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that in some cases sexual harassment is tolerated because victims want to avoid calling attention to themselves.**
 - *“We just want to fit in. That sounds really stupid and we should stand up for ourselves. But I think the main thing here is just trying to fly below the radar and not being called out for being ‘that person.’”* (Female)
 - *“Usually the people who get offended seem to be the shyer, quieter type. They don’t want to speak up in front of people and say, ‘No, I don’t want to hear that.’”* (Male)
 - *“A lot of times there’s an upperclass girl [nearby] that can say something, but if you don’t have an upperclassman, it leaves a plebe [freshman] girl in a tough position. What’s she supposed to do, she’s a plebe! There’s such a need to fit in. Standing up [when something offensive is said] at the table is probably the right thing to do, but a plebe is not in the right position. I don’t know if I would have been able to do it as a plebe.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated it is better for someone who is offended by something to speak up right away rather than to let the situation escalate to the point where it becomes harassment.**

- *“If the guys know you’re going to say something and get in their face and get aggressive because you’re offended, they’re probably going to slack off. If they know they can do it and you let them get away with it, you give them the entire field.”* (Female)
- *“I always try to say something as it happens. For the most part, by doing that they know not to do it after the first couple of times I say something.”* (Female)
- *“I think most people would agree that you should go and talk to them about it first. I’d much rather know what was coming rather than just getting fried for it.”*²²⁰ (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated, however, that the risk of speaking up is to become labeled as someone who is easily offended, with potentially serious consequences.**
 - *“If something really does bother you and you bring it up, you don’t want to be [labeled as] ‘that person.’”* (Female)
 - *“We live with each other 24/7. And you don’t want to be ‘that guy,’ so to speak. If you go up to someone when you’re offended by what they say, you’re getting labeled. They’re going to tell all their friends and all their friends are going to look at you and label you as well.”* (Male)
 - *“[If you are ‘that girl’] you’re ostracized. You’re completely shunned, even by other girls.”* (Female)
 - *“We had a girl who ended up leaving because [she was labeled] and nobody would talk to her. Especially none of the guys would talk to her, but also none of the girls would talk to her. She was basically living by herself.”* (Male)
 - *“I had to move companies as a plebe [freshman] because I tried to stand up for my friend when she was harassed. I was completely blacklisted from the rest of my company. They [said] I was the plague walking around because I was a plebe [freshman] that would say something when something was not right. I kind of feel like using that get-out-of-jail-free card at the beginning of my career here has been frustrating because I’ve seen incidents since then. But I’ve wanted to speak up and say something because I know it’s not right, but I feel like I have nowhere to go at this point. I’ve used up my move, so... .”* (Female)

²²⁰ “Getting fried” is midshipmen slang for having a conduct report filed against them by another midshipman.

- **When potentially offensive behavior gets to the point that it bothers someone, focus group participants indicated that other students will sometimes step forward to help. Fourth class (freshmen) women in the focus groups indicated they feel especially protected by their male classmates.**
 - *“If [midshipmen] see something they really think is sexual harassment they might approach the person the sexual harassment is directed to and ask if they need help. I think there’s a lot of support to help people if they feel like they’re in that situation.”* (Female)
 - *“As a girl we hear a lot of talk about other midshipmen girls. I think if I was in a group of guys and they were calling another midshipman girl a WUBA,²²¹ I would say ‘shut up.’ But it’s hard because it’s that gray area. You don’t know if it offends the person it’s directed towards. You don’t want to bring something up if it’s not an issue for them.”* (Female)
 - *“The guys in our company are protective of us, especially if they’re in our squad. If a situation was in the process of becoming worse they would usually try to sidetrack or move on to a different conversation.”* (Female)
 - *“If someone jokes with me they know I’m the biggest joker, I’ll go back and forth. Sometimes people take it too far and they’ll make you look stupid or put you in an awkward situation. The guys will instantly call them out right there.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated sexual harassment is tolerated more in some companies than in others, depending on the attitude of the company officers.**
 - *“I’ve had horrific things happen, like a company commander first semester said [something offensive] in front of most of my plebe [freshmen] company. It went on and on and on. It was disgusting. It’s tolerated so much in my company. They’ll say things and nobody does anything about it. I feel like they attack the same people over and over again. They know nobody will say anything, we just, like, don’t care. It doesn’t stop at a midshipman level. I think they see it in our leadership.”* (Female)
 - *“Something happened in my company last year that ended up with my company officer being removed from duty. Sexual harassment doesn’t get tolerated at the higher levels. Once it gets up the chain of command there are people set in place to take care of it.”* (Female)

²²¹ “WUBA” is a derogatory term used at USNA to refer to female midshipmen.

- “I think that if they put more of the onus on the company officer, like not with the whole SAVI [Sexual Assault Victim Intervention] system, but to respect both genders and be very politically correct, as hard as that is and as silly as that sounds, I think people would take the cue, the firsties [seniors], and then it would fall down from there.” (Female)
- “I think it goes company by company. My company is not really big into jokes at the table so we don’t really have a problem. It’s not like a brigade-wide thing. It’s company-wide.” (Male)
- “The jokes are mostly among the midshipmen. We don’t make that kind of joke in front of the company officer.” (Male)

Sexual Humor

- **Focus group participants indicated that sexual humor is a part of Academy culture. Joke telling is very common during mealtime, especially on Fridays, and there appears to be pressure to tell jokes of a sexual nature.**
 - “We have a Joke Friday²²² where the plebes [freshman] are supposed to tell a joke at lunch. You can tell whatever kind of joke you want but a lot of times the ones that are going to get the most laughs have a sexual aspect to them.” (Female)
 - “That’s the rule. If it’s not offensive, it’s probably not a good joke.” (Male)
 - “I’ll tell you a joke I heard the other day. What did the ugliest girl in the world say to the second ugliest girl in the world? The answer is: what company are you in? [It means that] we’re in companies, so [the ugly girls] must be mids [midshipmen].” (Female)
- **In spite of the pressure to tell jokes of a sexual nature, participants in the focus groups indicated that good judgment is exercised at the lunch table.**
 - “People are very cautious here. I don’t think they would purposely say something to put you in an uncomfortable situation. Because we’ve been briefed on so many of these things, it’s a touchy subject. You don’t want to mess with fire. You’re going to be burned here definitely.” (Female)

²²² Joke Friday is a tradition that requires telling of jokes at squad tables during mealtimes on Friday.

- *“I think a lot of us have become really good at being aware of the situation, like asking if it’s okay to tell a joke at the table, or asking if anybody is going to be offended by this type of joke.”* (Male)
- *“On Fridays when plebes [freshmen] tell jokes, if you have females you check with them to see if it is all right that this type of joke is presented before a joke is allowed to be told. ... Most of the time nobody minds.”* (Male)
- **When asked to explain when sexual humor stops being funny and becomes offensive, women in the focus groups indicated that it is usually the timing and/or the intent of the joke, rather than the content of the joke, that makes it offensive.**
 - *“I would say that [a sexual joke] is not okay in a professional situation. I think some people aren’t aware of the fact that there is a right time to say things and a wrong time to say things. Not a lot bothers me, but what does bother me is not the joke itself, but when the joke was told, and the fact that the timing was just really, really wrong.”* (Female)
 - *“Obviously guys tell jokes with each other, but if it’s with the squad where everybody is required to be there and has to listen, if it’s in a professional setting like that, any sexual innuendo or anything is out of place.”* (Female)
 - *“When they use a joke as their way to actually get out how they feel, but then they say, ‘Hey, it’s just a joke, you can take it, right?’ I know they really feel that way so it’s not funny.”* (Female)
- **Men in the focus groups indicated that they generally know when they have crossed the line and offended someone with a joke.**
 - *“They’ll retract from the conversation, or they might tell you straight up that they don’t like it.”* (Male)
 - *“If it’s bad enough there is dead silence, and somebody will say, ‘Wow, you went too far with that one.’”* (Male)

Safety and Sexual Assault and Harassment

The subject of sexual assault was not discussed in as much detail as sexual harassment during the USNA focus groups. However, feedback on sexual assault was obtained while discussing other topics, particularly the topic of safety on campus.

Definition and Frequency of Sexual Assault

- **Sexual assault was defined by participants in the focus groups as unwanted and/or violent physical contact. Unlike sexual harassment, participants indicated that sexual assault is an obvious act, easily recognized by both male and female students. Rape was the most common example given.**
 - *“Sexual harassment is a lot like how the victim perceives it. Someone could say something that’s not offensive to one person but it is to someone else. As far as sexual assault, for the most part, everyone feels it is wrong. ... There’s no gray area.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they are aware that sexual assault occasionally happens at the Academy, but most believe strongly that it happens much less frequently than it does at civilian colleges.**
 - *“The fact is that we’re 20 to 23 year old kids and kids that age screw up. But this body screws up a lot less than bodies this size elsewhere.”* (Male)
 - *“I went to a civilian university to see what it was like, and girls don’t walk across the campus through the dark there at night. You just don’t do it because you don’t know what kind of creeps are out there. I wouldn’t have a problem walking from Nimitz [the library] to Bancroft [the dormitory] through a dark place. The fact that someone’s going to attack me is the last thing that goes through my mind when I’m walking and there are no lights on.”* (Female)

Feelings of Safety

- **Overall, participants in the focus groups indicated they feel safe at the Academy.**
 - *“I’m not afraid to go out for a jog at 10:00 at night by myself.”* (Female)
 - *“A girl in my company [had an experience where] a youngster [sophomore] came by. He was kind of drunk, I guess. He walked into her room at night. She was like, ‘Holy crap, there’s a guy in my room, what do I do?’ She got the mate [company mate of the deck], the mate removed him from the room, took him to the youngster’s room [sophomore’s room] and then the mate did the right thing and woke up a firstie [senior]. Then the firstie called our company officer. It was almost ridiculous how many people were woken up to know the situation. But she said she felt safe because there are so many people who automatically reacted to the situation to help her out.”* (Female)

- *“On the weekend when everything is supposed to be going down, they always have CMODs [company mates of the deck] just walking around, and there’s always somebody up on alcohol watch.” (Male)*
- *“I don’t understand how people can say they don’t feel safe here. Females are allowed to lock their doors at night. ... Basically now there’s a roving CMOD on every deck at all times. There’s always somebody who’s going to hear you.” (Male)*
- *“If I screamed or talked loud or was, like, ‘Oh my God, get off of me!’ at 1:00 in the morning there’s no doubt in my mind that 10 guys would be in my room in 30 seconds to figure out what’s going on.” (Female)*
- **Focus group participants indicated that, although being able to lock their doors at night might help some women feel safe from sexual assault, there are situations where doors are left unlocked.**
 - *“You can lock your door after midnight, but you’re already asleep by then.” (Female)*
 - *“We can lock our door when we’re inside it, but our roommates don’t have a key. So if you go to bed and your roommate’s not back yet, you can’t lock your door. That’s what the problem is.” (Female)*
- **Focus group participants indicated that there might be some confusion about the locked-door policy.**
 - *“It’s a constant battle between us as plebe [freshmen] women and upperclassmen. [We say] ‘Yes, we can lock our doors, it’s in mid regs [midshipmen regulations]’ and they say, ‘No, you can’t.’” (Female)*
 - *“I know at the Air Force Academy they let you lock your doors at night, and they don’t have that policy here. You’re not allowed to do that.” (Female)*

Reasons for Not Feeling Safe

- **When asked to speculate why some students might not feel safe at the Academy, participants in several focus groups brought up the incident of a “midnight groper,” in which a man entered a woman’s room one night.**
 - *“It’s kind of scary to think that someone could come into your room at night and you wouldn’t know.” (Female)*

- *“They’re putting up watches trying to find the person. Nobody really knows anything, but I’m sure those individuals, when taking that survey, would not feel safe and probably their roommates and people who they’re friends with [would not feel safe either.]” (Male)*
- **According to focus group participants, there have also been incidents of men mistakenly walking into the rooms of women at night.**
 - *“A firstie [senior] walked up an extra deck by accident, and got in his exact rack one deck above [bed one floor above] [with a freshman girl]. ... It’s not like he climbed in her rack and started groping her [though]. It was an honest mistake. I’ve done that before.” (Female)*
 - *“I woke up and there was a guy changing at my desk. I was like, ‘Oh God! I don’t know what he’s doing.’ But then I recognized who he was and told him he was in the wrong room. He was so sorry. Just tired, not drunk. He was on watch all night.” (Female)*
- **When focus group participants were pressed, other possible reasons for not feeling safe at the Academy were discussed, although none were seen as a major concern.**
 - *“In the back of the Academy facing the football fields, there are like these two wings, they kind of face to the back. There’s like a little alley or whatever. It’s pitch black back there, that’s the scariest part for me. I just avoid going over there.” (Female)*
 - *“I could see instances with alcohol, where you have drunk guys coming back to the hall. I’ve seen guys knock on a plebe’s [freshman’s] door and say, ‘Hey.’ And usually one of his friends pulls him away.” (Male)*
 - *“[They may not feel safe] if they’ve had a bad experience in the past and they’re just not comfortable yet.” (Male)*
 - *“[At an Army/Navy football game] I’ve seen a female midshipman get harassed because she’s a midshipman female and she isn’t ugly.” (Male)*

Reasons for Sexual Assault

- **When asked for reasons why sexual assault happens in spite of the generally safe atmosphere at the Academy, participants in the focus groups suggested the following possibilities:**

- A few “bad apples” are admitted even though candidates for the Academy are screened: *“I see a lot of people that slip through the cracks and shouldn’t be officers in the Navy.”* (Male)
- Lack of situational awareness: *“The one brief we had showed the gray area. Sometimes a girl would be like, ‘This is cool, I’ll go to your room’ and all of a sudden something goes too far and it’s the gray area. That’s when the rape happens.”* (Female)
- Strict rules and punishments create stressful situations: *“There’s a rumor that we’re getting all weekday liberty taken away next year. If that happens it will be a complete lockdown for the whole week. What do you think is going to happen? You know, 3,000 guys, almost 1,000 women, somewhere around here. It’s just creating an environment and saying, sure you guys will be fine. Right. Something’s going to happen sometime just because of circumstances.”* (Male)

Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

After discussing sexual harassment and sexual assault, midshipmen were asked to give their opinions on the reporting system at USNA. Discussion centered around their understanding of reporting options, possible reasons for not reporting an incident, which reporting option they would most likely use, and how much they trust the reporting system in general.

Reporting Options

- **Although they do not use the terms “restricted” and “unrestricted,” participants in the focus groups understood the difference between the two reporting options. Focus group participants indicated that they generally see contacting the Sexual Assault Victim Intervention (SAVI) representative as the restricted option for both sexual assault and sexual harassment.**
 - *“Restricted reporting is when you go to the SAVI rather than going up the chain of command.”* (Male)
 - *“SAVIs are not required to take it forward if you say I need to talk about something.”* (Male)
 - *“If you go up through SAVI it’s a lot more confidential. And you don’t have to take action on the other person. You can get counseling and be completely under the table. If you report up your chain of command ... it’s confidential but not going to be kept as quiet. And then something has to happen to the other person.”* (Female)

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they knew how to report an incident through the Sexual Assault Victim Intervention (SAVI) representative.**
 - *“I would say most midshipmen know they can go to the SAVI guide and the SAVI guide is supposed to be the one to get you in touch with all these people you need to go through.”* (Female)
 - *“I would be willing to bet that midshipmen know how to get a hold of SAVIs better than most of the officers do. ... We know the SAVIs and get it pounded into our head from little 10 minute PowerPoint things saying, ‘This is the SAVI, and this is how you find them.’”* (Male)
- **Some female freshmen in the focus groups, however, had a misconception about the role of the Sexual Assault Victim Intervention (SAVI) representative when reporting a sexual assault.**
 - *“If you want to talk to someone about it but you don’t necessarily want to go through the formalities of reporting it and having an investigation, there are people you can talk to. But if you want to report it and have an investigation and you want the person to get in trouble, then go to SAVI.”* (Female)

Reasons for Not Reporting

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they would be inclined to avoid reporting sexual harassment unless they felt it was absolutely necessary. Doing so is viewed as a serious act; one that could cause the person reporting to be labeled for the rest of their career at the Academy.**
 - *“If you report something it is not looked at favorably at all. A lot of people don’t report it for that reason, all the repercussions that come along with it. You would always be talked about as the one who turned people in, for the rest of the time at the Academy. From plebe [freshman] year on, nobody would talk to you. It would be, ‘If I talk to her she’ll turn me in.’”* (Female)
 - *“I’ve talked about it with freshmen. I think they probably think that’s just the way things are and they don’t want to be the obnoxious little freshman to make a big deal about it.”* (Female)
 - *“Say your squad leader says something out of line and you call your squad leader out on it and piss your squad leader off. At the end of the year they play into your performance and your rankings, which isn’t the end of the world, but it’s something here at the Academy which affects other things down the line. There’s a fear, what else can they do to you?”* (Male)

- **Focus groups participants indicated some potential incidents of sexual harassment are not reported because the incidents are “not that bad.”**
 - *“Usually it’s not anything really that overtly offensive. It’s just little things, and I’m going to pick my battles so I’ll let that one slide.”* (Female)
 - *“I honestly think that people don’t report things because maybe they go back and look at it and think, it’s really not that big of a deal.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated another reason that someone might decide not to report an incident of sexual harassment is that the process can be time consuming and involve a lot of other people.**
 - *“I think another reason people don’t want to report sexual harassment is because it turns into an honor case. That process in itself takes a long time. There is a lot of paperwork involved, and lots of interviews. That’s how a lot of people end up knowing about your case, because the company level and battalion level and different boards hear your story.”* (Female)

Reporting Decision and Preferred Reporting Method

- **Women in the focus groups indicated that an incident of sexual harassment is serious enough to report when it is directed at a specific person or it involves an especially crude comment.**
 - *“[A comment is] unacceptable when it’s really, really explicit and crude or if it is about a specific person, like someone at the table.”* (Female)
 - *“One of my close friends said one day she was eating lunch with her squad and two of the upperclass males in her squad were talking about how they went to some whorehouse or something and how cheap it was and what they had done. And they asked my friend why she doesn’t do that because they make so much money and you would be so rich by a certain age. And like just going on and on about it. I think that was a situation where she definitely could have reported it. She probably should have. She told me how uncomfortable it made her feel.”* (Female)
- **Women in the focus groups indicated that they would be much more likely to report sexual assault than sexual harassment, but they would still think twice about reporting an assault because they have seen people shunned for doing so.**
 - *“One of my best friends is a [USNA] grad. Her plebe [freshman] year she got really close with a handful of guys in her company. They planned a spring break. It was supposed to be three girls and three guys, and they got two*

rooms. ... Then crunch time came and it wound up that only her and the three guys could go. The one guy she thought was her best friend out of all of them took advantage of her one night. So it wound up being a huge mess. She came back and she reported it because it was bad. She was completely shunned from her company. It took her almost until senior year before she could talk to some people in the company again.” (Female)

- “I know about a case where a female reported [an incident of sexual assault] and the guy was a football player. Everybody loves football here at the Academy. If you’re a female accusing him of rape or sexual harassment and he gets busted, yes that’s good because you feel some kind of whatever, but there’s going to be at least a thousand people walking around [saying], ‘Look at that girl, she did this to this guy.’” (Female)

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they would have their friends help them decide if they should report an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault.**

- “If I really felt like I needed to report something, I’d probably, first thing, talk to my roommates and probably get a lot of opinions from a lot of my other close friends before I did something. Because you can have a great idea and it could be the worst idea, so I’d want to get all the information, get every side before I proceeded with something. Because I may think it’s a big deal but other people would, you know, say, ‘Have you ever looked at it like this?’” (Male)

- **If they were to report an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault, participants in the focus groups indicated that they would discuss it with a chaplain.**

- “I think the first person I would go to would be a chaplain. Everyone knows chaplains have confidentiality in everything. That’s always safe.” (Female)
- “You go to a chaplain because you want comfort.” (Female)

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated varying attitudes regarding whether they would report an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault through a Sexual Assault Victim Intervention (SAVI) representative. Those who would be reluctant to do so worry about a breakdown in confidentiality and the level of training received by SAVI representatives.**

- “SAVI is the most consistent [way of reporting]. If you have a bad company officer, they may be very cautious or overly cautious with it because they may be career, so they want to watch out for themselves—how their company’s

doing, how they're going to be looked at—versus the SAVI, that's their whole mission.” (Male)

- “I don't like the whole idea of SAVI personally because of the way they have it in the brigade. With it being one of your peers, I personally wouldn't go talk to him. I think they should have people outside the Academy doing stuff like that.” (Male)
- “I don't think they're qualified enough and they won't keep it confidential. Even though they've been screened and all that, I know it's a bad way of thinking about that system, but I personally don't trust it that much.” (Female)
- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that they would be cautious about going through the chain of command to report an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault.**
 - “I think going to the midshipmen chain of command is a little rash. That rumor mill can start like crazy.” (Male)
 - “I think people are hesitant to go to officers. They have that sort of like official type quality. They would probably be the ones that would have to bring something higher, as opposed to a roommate or a SAVI guide.” (Female)

Trust in Reporting System

- **Men in the focus groups indicated that “the system” would protect the victim of a sexual assault, but not necessarily deal fairly with the person accused of sexual assault. Some women agreed.**
 - “I know of a case where a female had an imaginary relationship with one of the upperclass and because she said it, he got fried.²²³ And it turned out it was clear there was nothing happening there, but because she said it he got screwed over.” (Male)
 - “It's good we've swung towards giving women the benefit of the doubt, but I think we've gone too far to the point where basically if there's any question, the guy raped her and she's getting off scot free.” (Male)
 - “It's probably the biggest cause of cynicism from the rest of the brigade. You see this case and the guy gets slammed with sexual assault, sexual harassment,

²²³ “Getting fried” is midshipmen slang for having a conduct report filed against them by another midshipman.

sex in the hall, drinking underage, blowing above a .08²²⁴ or whatever, he gets tossed out on his rear. While the girl who is also underage had way too much to drink, blacked out, all this stuff, she's given immunity from all that because she came forward. Did she come forward because she was actually raped or did she come forward to cover herself?" (Male)

- *"I've noticed a backlash for guys now. It's too easy for a girl to say something that didn't happen. Girls are totally protected. It's almost like now the guys are the ones who would have to be really cautious."* (Female)

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated varying levels of trust in how well the system deals with reports of harassment. Some participants in the focus groups indicated the system works, while others felt that it takes too long and is too complicated.**

- *"I've actually been involved with a sexual harassment case that was happening to one of my friends. The system works and it takes care of what it needs to take care of."* (Female)
- *"I think they are legitimately trying their best, but it doesn't work that well. One, it takes forever. They're investigating this, that, and the other. And the rumor mill starts. Everybody thinks they know what's going on and that makes it worse. And it just keeps like piling on. You're 'that girl' and you're not spoken to. It's like this whole mess of crap."* (Female)
- *"Some people have had great experiences with SAVI [Sexual Assault Victim Intervention], but I was involved in an investigation. And I would never go back. It took so long. It wasn't a high press issue. And I mean, it was a slow long boiling issue and they took a long time and they dragged their feet. I had to tell about 16,000 people my different feelings, different people had to be called in, retell the story a thousand times."* (Female)

- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that "the system" is overly aggressive in dealing with incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**

- *"We've had a couple of rape cases come up in the past years here. I think sometimes those are – not so much blown out of proportion – but it's made known to the brigade that this is a problem and that the administration here isn't going to stand for it. So they make examples out of people who are in that situation."* (Female)

²²⁴ "Blowing above a .08" refers to the Naval Academy's policy of enforcing its alcohol regulations with breathalyzer tests.

- *“There was a girl in my company who heard something and then approached the person who offended her. But another officer had heard what had happened and she actually put it in the system and the system took it far beyond what the person wanted.”* (Male)
- *“It seems like the Academy is more concerned about image than anything else. If they have the image of zero tolerance we have a safe school, we do not tolerate this kind of behavior and we’ll take the necessary actions when an incident does occur. That’s the image they want. ... It’s almost as if they have no conscience about what they’re doing. Maybe this person did something that was an honest mistake. Maybe they’ve had the same attitude their entire life and maybe they didn’t realize there was anything wrong to it. Well, if that was the case I don’t think they would get any remorse from the system at all. I think they’d nail them to the wall and make an example out of them.”* (Male)

Training

USNA provides midshipmen with training on the issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Focus group participants were asked to identify the training methods which they feel have been most and least effective and give training suggestions of their own.

Type and Amount of Training

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they receive a significant amount of training on the issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Many indicated that it is too much.**
 - *“I hate to use the word desensitize, but you do it so often, they talk about it so much. If they mention it once in awhile it’s a good point. But if you hear it all the time then you don’t really think about it like you should. I think it might be going a little over the top. It might almost have a slightly negative effect.”*
(Male)

Most Effective Training Methods

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that utilizing speakers is a good way to present information about sexual harassment and sexual assault. The most effective speakers were dynamic, presented information that made them think, and got the audience involved. A good example was a lawyer who had recently spoken at the Academy.**
 - *“A lawyer came and talked to us. He gave us a real world situation, something that really happened. It was both sides, one of these gray area cases. We were all essentially members of the jury. ... That was probably the single best brief*

I've ever been to. I thought it was very interesting because of the way it was presented.” (Male)

- *“[The lawyer] made me think that there’s a black, white, and gray area. Everyone knows to stay out of the black area. But I’m definitely going to try to stay out of the gray area as much as possible. You never know which way it’s going to go.” (Male)*
- *“I think from a female perspective some of the time I feel like, how do I know if someone’s a victim or if they’re making something up? Do I stand up for them because I’m a woman as well, or do I sort of hang them out to dry? [The lawyer] was a good brief because it got you thinking about stuff like that. There was a lot of discussion that happened afterward too, between midshipmen.” (Female)*

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they also like to hear speakers with real-life stories related to sexual harassment and/or assault.**

- *“When you have somebody come and tell you their personal story that’s pretty effective. You take it to heart.” (Male)*
- *“I thought the rape victim that spoke to us was very good. She was a very good speaker and really drew the audience in. She had a measure of humor and seriousness about it that made people listen closer.” (Female)*
- *“It’s a little more personal when the victim is right there. I think it becomes personal even with the males. It’s effective with both the males and females.” (Female)*

- **Focus group participants also indicated they liked speakers who were officers who could talk about situations that could actually happen at the Academy.**

- *“I like the one that was presented by different officers in the yard. It wasn’t just a typical brief where they got up with a PowerPoint and ... went down the gamut of everything you need to know. They actually talked about it. You heard from a male and female officer. ... They went through an example of a situation that would happen. Then they had, like, audience interaction, like, what would you do, what do you think she was thinking, and so forth. ... They addressed the complexity of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and rape.” (Female)*
- *“We had a captain in the Marine Corps [speak to us]. ... I know the males had a captain in the Marine Corps as well. They were both dynamic speakers. The Sup [Superintendent] gave his thing to open it up, and the two women who are*

the attorneys for the SAVI [Sexual Assault Victim Intervention] program spoke. But mainly it was well respected officers. Ours laid it out pretty straight, don't be stupid, think before you act. Things you know down inside but you don't always do when you're in the moment. I think that was probably the best SAVI brief I've ever been to." (Female)

- **Focus group participants indicated that using humor is an effective way to train on the topics of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *"I think they do a good job trying to make [training] informative but fun at the same time. They had this slide show movie thing, something about sexual consent. It was pretty hilarious of this girl going through this checklist." (Female)*
 - *"This year we had a skit group that came and did an improv thing about different things that involve alcohol and situations you get into and stuff, sexual harassment, and when too far is too far in a comedic sort of thing. Then we had a discussion with our SAVI [Sexual Assault Victim Intervention] guides. ... It was better than I thought it was going to be." (Male)*
- **Focus group participants also indicated they liked small group training sessions where they could talk freely and discuss issues related to sexual assault and harassment.**
 - *"I think that what's effective for me is to talk about it myself or discuss it with other people instead of getting talked at. The opportunity to have immediate feedback on issues and ideas ... in a group like this or maybe double the size, at most, would probably be more effective for me in terms of remembering specific things." (Female)*
 - *"The best training I went to wasn't mandatory. The English department puts on a play every year called 'Under Covers.' It's where a bunch of kids read monologues. They're not necessarily true. Some are from personal experience and others they make up. ... There's no ban on what you can say. It will make some people uncomfortable, but it makes you think about it. ... It's something you remember for awhile." (Female)*
- **Female freshmen in the focus groups indicated that they value training opportunities that involve informal discussions with upperclassmen.**
 - *"In our company we took all the freshman and sophomore girls and we got together in an empty room and talked about how you can prevent some things from happening. Or if any situations were to occur how to solve it in your chain of command. That was very good because we could speak more comfortably*

because it was the next class above us and they were our mentors. And we could more easily relate with them.” (Female)

- *“The experience with an upperclass girl when I was a freshman made me feel better about standing up for myself. You have people that support you and you’re, like, okay, they’re doing fine. They made it through four years here, I’m doing fine too.” (Female)*
- **While a number of focus group participants indicated a desire to include some training sessions with both genders, some indicated they feel uncomfortable in training sessions that include both male and female students.**
 - *“The [skit with the actors] was awkward because they gave signs like stop, go. In my position I was sitting with all my guy friends in my company. In the first two seconds I wanted to put up my stop sign. And nobody around me was putting their sign up. And I was waiting for people. I didn’t want to look like a prude.” (Female)*
 - *“[The Man Box presentation²²⁵] had never been given to women before. It had always been an all male audience but we were included [this time]. I think that’s why the majority of females didn’t like it. And the guys felt uncomfortable because there were females in the audience.” (Female)*

Least Effective Training Methods

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that the least effective method of training students on sexual harassment and sexual assault was to give a PowerPoint presentation.**
 - *“You can sit there and click PowerPoint slides, death by PowerPoint, all day long. It’s not going to get through to anyone, especially when it’s the same message over and over. ... You’re beating a dead horse. It’s not sinking in any further than it already has.” (Male)*
- **Focus group participants also indicated that large-scale mandatory briefs and lectures are not very effective.**
 - *“The big mandatory briefs where we have to go to Alumni [auditorium] and sit, a lot of those aren’t effective. We’ve had so many of them, we just think, ‘I have to go to another SAVI [Sexual Assault Victim Intervention] brief.’” (Female)*

²²⁵ The “Man Box” refers to an educational program called “Breaking Out of the Man Box” distributed by the group A Call to Men.

- “[The least effective training is] brigade-wide, four thousand people in one audience. It’s hot, it’s long. People get cranky.” (Female)
- “To tell you the truth, during plebe [freshman] summer we were so tired and exhausted, once you sit us in the chair, three inches of our chair, we’re not listening. We’re just surviving through the brief [trying to] stay awake.” (Female)

Suggested Training Options

- **Some participants in the focus groups expressed a desire to get more information about sexual harassment, rather than always hearing about sexual assault.**
 - “The training is always a worse case scenario, like rape. Guys might think, ‘I’m not raping anybody,’ but they don’t talk about the smaller levels of things going on. ... They don’t talk about sexual harassment as much.” (Female)
 - “We never receive training on sexual harassment because the SAVI is all sexual assault.” (Female)
 - “I think the harassment training is really vague. Everyone knows what the green zone and where the red zone is, but in the middle ... is a gray area.²²⁶ They never really give examples. I almost feel there should be like XYZ cases²²⁷ that give an example of what someone said to someone else and then explain that this is not okay, because a lot of people interpret it differently....” (Male)
- **Some female focus group participants indicated they would like to receive training on what to do if a victim of sexual harassment or sexual assault comes to you as a friend.**
 - “Have a brief for males that’s focused on what to do if your sister or one of your good friends comes to you, how to react to that. I think that brings the point closer to home all across the board as far as the rape goes.” (Female)
 - “Most times I think none of us really expect it to happen to us. So I think that’s the impression a lot of midshipmen think when they come and talk about rape. Oh, they’re talking to me, saying I shouldn’t rape somebody or I shouldn’t be doing these things. It’s more about this is going to happen to other people and I

²²⁶ “Green zone” and “red zone” refer to gender relations training for identifying acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

²²⁷ XYZ cases are case studies used in discussions.

think it's better to have briefs with how would you deal with this and how would you help this person.” (Female)

- **Some female participants in the focus groups, mainly the freshmen, suggested not making the training mandatory or perhaps offering students a choice on how to complete the training.**
 - *“There’s a stigma if it’s mandatory. If it’s mandatory you automatically hate it.” (Female)*
 - *“For mandatory events, especially with sexual assault and SAVI [Sexual Assault Victim Intervention] and stuff like that, everyone goes in with a bitter negative attitude about it, like they’re wasting our time again. Because you get it drilled over and over. I think that sort of makes some of the guys feel like if we didn’t have women here we wouldn’t have to go to this. Makes it a little less cohesive at least for a little while, until it smoothes back over afterwards.” (Female)*
 - *“Instead of mandatory, encourage it within your command structure ... We’ve had a lot of firsties [seniors] in our company talk to the plebes [freshmen]. They say ‘Don’t flirt with youngsters [sophomores], be careful because the perception is reality.’ ... I think a lot of upperclass girls see it as their responsibility to help out the plebe [freshmen] girls.” (Female)*
 - *“As far as effectiveness of training, we always talk about constraints on our time. Maybe providing options for us, for example, you can either do this two-hour long training on the computer that has to be due by Friday, or you have to go to a small group discussion at 7:00 on Thursday night. ... You’re prone to pick what’s going to appeal to you better.” (Female)*

Leadership Preparation

Because midshipmen at USNA are being prepared for future leadership roles, focus group participants were asked for input on how well they are being prepared to deal with sexual harassment and sexual assault when they become Naval officers on active duty.

- **Some focus group participants indicated that they receive little, if any, information to prepare them for dealing with sexual harassment and sexual assault after they graduate and become officers.**
 - *“The message they’re trying to send is that this [sexual harassment and sexual assault] is an issue out there. The thing the Academy misses is portraying that you’re going to [eventually] be an officer and deal with issues like this.” (Female)*

- *“It’s so hard, like I’ve heard stories from the other officers about how things get out of hand quickly [in the fleet]. It makes me want to not sign up to be the investigating officer when I get to my command.” (Male)*
- **Some focus group participants indicated that they would welcome training specifically designed to help them deal with situations they might encounter when they have their own command and suggested the following:**
 - *“You start out with a big informational brief on sexual assault and sexual harassment, and then you do follow-ups with smaller groups, with either discussion groups like this, 10 or 12 of us here, or maybe larger groups, like company sessions. But in order to facilitate those smaller follow-ups you would need people that are actually semi-trained in conducting that kind of discussion. If you were to train your upperclass in how to direct these discussions and how to be aware, that would not only create awareness for your under class but it would also prepare those that are preparing to graduate and go out into the fleet on how to handle those kinds of situations.” (Female)*
 - *“[The Academy could] maybe do education on, as an officer, this is how to help people. If someone comes to you, these are the things to say and not to say. This is the law side of it. If they do this, then they have to go forward with it or if they don’t do this they can keep it to themselves, and who they can talk to without having to go forward with it. Stuff like that, I think, would be really good training for us at the Academy.” (Female)*
 - *“Real life stories are good too. Maybe bring in an officer who had to deal with one of their people being raped.” (Female)*
- **Other participants in the focus groups indicated that they do not need any special training on how to deal with sexual harassment and sexual assault as a leader.**
 - *“I think everything you do adds to helping you make a decision [when you’re in a leadership role]. I don’t think one thing can be pinpointed. It’s a collective experience that helps you make a decision.” (Male)*
 - *“You can be a person who listens [to your subordinates], but I wouldn’t feel like it’s my place to help in a sense. I think they teach us that. They tell you to give them a list of resources to go to, but not express your personal opinion. There’s a whole line you have to have between your subordinates and yourself.” (Female)*

Communication From the Academy

The subject of communication was introduced in the USNA focus groups to determine how midshipmen felt about the information they currently receive from the Academy regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault. Midshipmen were also given a chance to voice their opinions on the type of information they would like to receive from the Academy.

Current Communication About Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they receive little from the Academy in the way of general statistics about sexual harassment and sexual assault, and little, if any, information from past survey results.**
- **Focus group participants also indicated that they receive very little information from the Academy about specific instances of sexual harassment and sexual assault on campus.**
 - *“They send out e-mails. They don’t give us details but they say an incident happened, if it’s sexual assault or with alcohol, and they say in the e-mail just to keep the rumor mill down. Don’t talk about it, and just wait for official news to come out.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that they do, however, receive frequent behavioral reminders from the Superintendent.**
 - *“Every time he talks, he might be talking about what we’re going to be doing after we graduate, but he’ll always bring up alcohol, honor, and sexual assault/harassment. It’s every time.”* (Male)
- **In the absence of official information from the Academy about specific instances of sexual harassment and sexual assault, participants in the focus groups indicated that much of what they know comes through the rumor mill.**
 - *“It’s kind of frustrating because you have no idea what to believe. It’s just like you get caught up in the rumors, and you’re, like, who even knows what happened?”* (Male)
 - *“We’re so in the dark, we’re hearing tons of rumors here. Pretty much all we can see is the female’s given complete immunity regardless of the outcome of the case. ... They never really cleared up what exactly the male was separated for since he was found not guilty.”* (Male)

- **Focus group participants also indicated they hear about sexual harassment and sexual assault cases from sources outside the Academy, such as family, friends, and the news media.**
 - *“If anything happens, my mom is liable to know faster than I am.”* (Male)
 - *“It’s weird when your friends at home know more about it than you do.”* (Male)
 - *“There’ve been some problems with us getting information from the news and not hearing anything from the administration about high profile cases.”* (Male)

Desired Communication About Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

- **While participants in the focus groups recognized the importance of maintaining confidentiality, they also indicated a desire for information from the Academy about specific incidents of sexual harassment and/or sexual assault that would dispel rumors and explain what really happened.**
 - *“I think it’s good we keep it quiet for the victims and other people involved ... but this is someplace I live 24/7. I go to school here, I eat here, I sleep here, and I want to know.”* (Female)
 - *“We live with people 24/7. To hear that they’re getting kicked out and going away for some reason that is not justified whatsoever, you want answers and you demand the answers. But no one seems to want to give them to you except for the Baltimore Sun.”* (Male)
 - *“Mids [would] appreciate the Sup [Superintendent] saying why he made the decisions he did. People ask me why that happened to this midshipman and I say, ‘I don’t know, the Sup made the decision.’ So nobody really knows what things he’s punishing.”* (Male)
 - *“We don’t [want to] argue the results or the verdict or whatever is being read. We’re just curious as to why, just the explanation, so we can understand instead of us wandering around blind.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated that using XYZ cases²²⁸ to share information about specific cases of sexual harassment or sexual assault is a potentially useful**

²²⁸ XYZ cases are case studies used in discussions.

form of communication, but some participants were worried about maintaining confidentiality when using that method.

- “[For conduct cases] the XYZ cases don’t say the name but we pretty much know who it is. When you take something like sexual assault and sexual attack and put it on a sheet, people are probably going to know who it is. It turns into a touchy subject.” (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated they would also like to receive information on the number of sexual harassment and sexual assault incidents happening on campus.**
 - “Mids [midshipmen] react very well to numbers. Last year we had many cases of this in the brigade. And mids drop their jaw knowing how many cases happen.” (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they preferred information about sexual harassment and sexual assault to be shared personally, not via mass e-mails which are often deleted.**
 - “I think having your company officer get together with your company [is the best way]. Not everyone’s going to want to go, so maybe your company officer or squad leader, something smaller.” (Male)
 - “We get probably 50 e-mails on average a day. It’s going to get instantaneous delete button from about 60 percent of the midshipmen here. If you really want the midshipmen to take you seriously it’s going to require having someone present it. The information is looked at as a lot more legitimate because someone is saying ‘Here’s the information and if you have questions you can come to me with the questions.’” (Male)

Alcohol

Because incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment often involve the use of alcohol, a block of time in each focus group discussed the effectiveness of current alcohol policies and alcohol training.

Role of Alcohol in Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Incidents

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that alcohol almost always plays a significant role in situations of sexual assault, and sometimes in situations of sexual harassment as well. Alcohol is said to loosen inhibitions, cause poor judgment, and put people in a position that they normally would not be in.**

- *“In any case [of assault] you hear about, someone was drinking. There’s never a time you don’t hear about alcohol.”* (Female)
- *“When you drink a lot, you get more loose and guys get more comfortable. They joke around a lot more. Then the next day they say, ‘Oh, my God, I don’t believe I said that last night!’”* (Female)
- *“The consumption of alcohol is opening Pandora’s box. ... After awhile you’re going to do things you didn’t think you would do. That’s what happens when you drink. You can’t control yourself.”* (Male)
- *“I was [standing watch] one weekend at night. Someone in my upperclass came up and he was drunk. I didn’t say anything at first. I greeted him, then he started looking at me and was talking to me. I felt kind of uncomfortable. It kept dragging on and on. And he was acting like he was flirting with me. So since he didn’t seem to go anywhere I started walking toward his room and tried to get him to go to his room. Alcohol does have a huge part in it because the next day he was completely fine. He didn’t act like that at all. I don’t think he remembered what happened.”* (Female)
- **There was general agreement among participants in the focus groups that being under the influence of alcohol is not an excuse for sexual harassment or sexual assault and it does not absolve anyone from fault.**
 - *“If you’re under the influence of alcohol and you assault someone, you’re at fault just because you drank yourself into oblivion and can no longer think coherently. You’re still responsible because you made the decision to drink that much.”* (Female)
 - *“If a girl goes out and gets drunk and then gets picked up by some guy and gets herself in a world of trouble, I’m not saying she’s responsible but I definitely don’t have the same amount of sympathy I have for someone else who was, like, mugged on the street. Because to some extent she didn’t take care of herself.”* (Male)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they can protect themselves from being a victim or being the aggressor of sexual assault/harassment by watching out for each other and being aware of potentially risky situations when alcohol is involved.**
 - *“You go out with your company mates. It’s like your family and you take care of each other. ... Especially when you become upperclass you take care of each other and take turns being the one who is responsible.”* (Female)

- “[You should] always go out with friends. Always have sober friends. Watch over everybody.” (Female)
- “Know your surroundings. When I go out with my friends I make sure I know where they are.” (Female)

Effectiveness of Alcohol Policies

- **Focus group participants indicated that alcohol policies are intended to prevent students from abusive drinking, but they work just the opposite for some.**
 - “We are so restricted, I think when we’re allowed to go out, midshipmen tend to drink heavier. We aren’t around alcohol as much as other college students. When given the opportunity [to drink], we go all out.” (Male)
 - “[As the policies get stricter] we try to find more ways around the policy rather than following the policy.” (Male)
 - “[With the 0013 guidelines²²⁹] I think their intentions are good and I think the idea behind it is good. But it makes mids [midshipmen] even more bitter and more cynical, and more ‘I’m going to stick it to the man and get belligerently drunk tonight.’” (Female)
 - “I think the Academy’s heart is in the right place with 0013, but I would say for 99 percent of the midshipmen, they don’t really appreciate having a rule like that.” (Female)
- **Some focus groups participants indicated that the alcohol policies are not enforced consistently.**
 - “There was a big group on a maneuver and a lot of people in that group consumed alcohol. ... One battalion got off scot free. Another company took it to the company level and gave all the midshipmen in their company the highest punishment they could. And another battalion did something else. And it was all different but for the same offense.” (Male)
 - “You have one group of midshipmen who all get in trouble, they’re out on MO [movement orders], but that group is spread out over the six battalions, so each different battalion commander gets to judge however they want. One person could get nothing, one could get maxed out completely.” (Male)

²²⁹ The 0013 guidelines refer to the USNA Midshipmen Alcohol Abuse Prevention Guideline, which states “0 drinking under age 21, 0 drinking and driving, 1 drink per hour, 3 drinks maximum per evening.”

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that random breathalyzers on Saturday nights do not deter heavy drinking and can actually encourage unsafe behavior.**
 - *“I’ve known guys who’ve gotten ridiculously wasted and will sleep in a park bench in Annapolis until about 4 o’clock in the morning so they don’t have to come back and be breathalyzed.”* (Male)
 - *“[Because of the breathalyzing] people want to stay out and that’s going to increase the incidents of sexual assault and harassment because it’s going to happen in town to civilian women.”* (Male)
 - *“If you make people scared to come back to the hall after they’ve been drinking it creates an unsafe situation. They’re going to the random sponsor’s house, and who knows who is there? They have to give a little more leeway and make it comfortable for you to come back to the hall and let people take care of you. Everybody has a bad night where they drink too much.”* (Female)
 - *“It is a lesser offense to come back and get UA [unauthorized absence], be unaccounted for, than get breathalyzed. If you blow over .2²³⁰ chances are you are probably going to get kicked out. ... You want to talk about safety, that’s not safe if you can’t come back to your home.”* (Male)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they are frustrated by the fact that current alcohol policies penalize students who behave responsibly when they have been drinking and also penalize non-drinkers who help friends who have been drinking.**
 - *“I think if you come back and no matter how drunk you are, if you go straight to your rack [your bunk] and you’re responsible, then you’ve obviously showed you’re a responsible adult. If you come back and you start trashing Bancroft Hall [the dormitory], obviously you’re not being responsible, and you should be hammered to the full extent.”* (Male)
 - *“It should be based on your behavior. ... Some people come back, go to sleep, and are woken up for breathalyzer and they get in conduct trouble, but somebody with them is not as drunk and is acting just wild, nothing happens to them. That seems really backward.”* (Female)
 - *“I know of one instance where two guys, it was one guy’s 21st birthday, he gets drunk, they call their roommate because they can’t drive back. The roommate,*

²³⁰ Test .2 or more blood alcohol content on a breathalyzer test.

he goes back, he picks up his buds, brings them back to the hall. The roommate gets nearly maxed out the exact same for helping them. You could say his roommate should have done something else, but I think classmate law should be given some credit.” (Male)

Alcohol Training

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they receive too much alcohol training, especially when only a small percentage of students need it.**
 - *“Ninety-five percent of the people do it right but they have to make the rules based on how they’re dealing with the 5 percent who screw up. If I could talk to them I would tell them you need to have fairly reasonable rules in place where you nail somebody if they’re that stupid. Make it like a one strike policy, like if you blow over .2²³¹ and you’re disorderly, maybe not kick them out the first time, give them another shot. And if they do it again kick them out. There could also be some offenses where you kick them out the first time.” (Male)*
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they strongly dislike the three-hour online alcohol training that is required of all freshmen.**
 - *“The online training is useless. ... It doesn’t matter if I know what certain cortexes are affected by alcohol.” (Male)*
 - *“It doesn’t need to be so long. It’s split into sections. I felt like there was repetitive information that was either in sections before or was going to come later. They also had the case studies and they would be, like, think about these people and their motives. It was, like, you haven’t given us enough information to be able to understand these people’s motives.” (Female)*
- **Female freshmen focus group participants indicated that they liked the Professional Knowledge method of learning about alcohol.²³²**
 - *“We have so many mandatory briefs, they just repeat the information so many times. But we have the Pro Knowledge Quiz, where you have to learn something throughout the week. You have a quiz at the end of the week. One of our last ones was on character and alcohol. It was good and it was short. We have to memorize it. We’re required to take a test on it that I have to pass,*

²³¹ Test .2 or more blood alcohol content on a breathalyzer test.

²³² Professional Knowledge is a method whereby upperclassmen challenge lowerclassmen on their knowledge about various military topics.

instead of going through a three-hour brief that does the same exact thing.”
(Female)

- *“Out of all the things to stress in a quiz that was probably one of the most helpful ones. We had to understand based on your weight how much you can drink. And we had to calculate it and answer questions about it. That was something that we could actually apply rather than just flush it.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they favor alcohol training that teaches them to drink and act responsibly.**
 - *“The Academy’s stance is 0013,²³³ drink in moderation. I think that could be good, but I also think that a lot of midshipmen automatically disregard it. So maybe a better message to preach would be, like, make sure someone in your group is going to be the responsible one for the night.”* (Female)
 - *“My battalion officer came and talked to our company. He had his own drinking policy. It was 0031. The zeros are no underage drinking and not drinking and driving. The 3 and 1 mean three drinks in the first hour and one every hour after that. You can feel the effects of alcohol and have fun with your friends and maintain it by having one beer every hour after, but on that drinking policy you’ll not get to the point you’re so inebriated you lose control or put yourself in a situation you might not necessarily want to be in. I think that fosters being responsible while you’re out drinking instead of something unrealistic that midshipmen are going to resent right away.”* (Female)
 - *“I like when it’s handled on the company level. It sort of bolsters company pride in the fact that you can have a good time on the weekend but to seriously watch out for the people that you’re going to be seeing and working with again on Monday morning.”* (Female)

Dating at USNA

When time permitted, midshipmen in the focus groups were asked to discuss dating policies and sexual misconduct at USNA. The goal was to determine how midshipmen feel about the relationship rules, and whether midshipmen couples feel pressured to break the rules.

- **Women in the focus groups indicated that the dating and relationship rules are appropriate and necessary.**

²³³ The 0013 guidelines refer to the USNA Midshipmen Alcohol Abuse Prevention Guideline, which states “0 drinking under age 21, 0 drinking and driving, 1 drink per hour, 3 drinks maximum per evening.”

- *“Plebes [freshman] can’t date upperclass. ... I understand that. It’s good because it’s only a year that the one person’s a plebe [freshman]. And it’s like the whole boundaries and being professional thing. That makes sense too.”*
(Female)
- *“[The fact that holding hands and kissing is not allowed] really sucks, especially if you’re in a relationship with somebody here. You’re here all the time and you can’t be affectionate at all. But it’s also necessary for the environment.”* (Female)
- *“I’m a very conservative person and I don’t like the idea of having my roommate making out in the corner while I’m typing a paper. ... That’s one of the main reasons they have the rules. Just caring about other people in that respect.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that, because of the dating and relationship rules, midshipmen couples sometimes “sneak around” and/or break the rules.**
 - *“If you can’t give someone a hug, you know you’re going to be sneaking somewhere else. If somebody love chits²³⁴ out of a company you know something’s been going on for quite a while. You wouldn’t make that decision overnight. That’s sneaking around too, so it seems like everything’s secretive.”*
(Female)
 - *“People are going to do what they want to do regardless of whether or not there are rules. ... If no one’s there, nobody’s going to find out. People are going to do what they can get away with.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that breaking relationship rules is tolerated to a certain degree.**
 - *“I think a lot of mids’ [midshipmen’s] viewpoint is as long as it’s in the hall and as long as sex and stuff is not happening, they’re going to look the other way. If you just want to hold hands or hug or kiss, they’re not really going to care.”*
(Male)
 - *“It’s a shipmate loyalty kind of thing. If you see your friend and a girlfriend holding hands or hugging ... I’m not going to go blow the whistle on them.”*
(Male)

²³⁴ Approved transfer to another company to separate couples.

- *“If it’s a company relationship and people do find out, they most likely aren’t going to get you in trouble. They’re going to ask you to get a love chit.”*
(Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated that sometimes midshipmen couples receive pressure or encouragement from others to take their relationship further than they want to go.**
 - *“I’m in a pretty conservative relationship right now. I have people going, ‘You’re dating, why aren’t you doing this and that?’”* (Female)
 - *“One of my roommates complains how everyone says she is probably sleeping with her boyfriend who is a mid. People say things about her and him together. And make up the fallacies when they go off to study they’re doing something else in the library. Regardless if it’s true, the point of the matter is the guys like to assume the worse.”* (Female)
- **Some male participants in the focus groups reported that they completely avoid dating female midshipmen because of the potential problems it could cause.**
 - *“I feel dating brings an awkwardness to the command climate. When you have people who are dating in a relationship, it’s just harder for people to have authority and stuff.”* (Male)
 - *“I don’t think dating is necessarily looked down upon, it’s just that I think most guys don’t want to touch it because if you do happen to do something it doesn’t matter what happens, it’s seen that the guys are always in the wrong to start off with.”* (Male)

Additional Topics

At the close of each focus group, midshipmen were given an opportunity to voice additional comments about anything related to sexual assault or sexual harassment. Their comments, which are shown in this section, reflect issues that are very important to them.

- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that they would like to be trusted more by Academy leadership.**
 - *“Instead of trying to promote more personal responsibility [it seems like] they take away your responsibility and try to make you into a five year old, instead of saying hey, if you’re going to go lead people, you have to be responsible for yourself and others. ... When you get out in the fleet it’s almost like you’re starting from scratch trying to promote personal responsibility.”* (Male)

- *“It’s almost like you come in 18 and you come out 18 because you never get a chance to demonstrate how responsible you are because they slap all these rules on you. ... So when people break out of the Academy, it’s like a whole different mindset because now they’re in a world where there are no rules and everything is on yourself instead of on your company officer or your senior enlisted guy watching your back and making sure you’re not breaking any of the Academy rules.” (Male)*
- **Focus group participants indicated they wanted people to know that, in spite of the somewhat negative topics discussed in the focus groups, and in spite of what the media may report, the Academy is a great place to be.**
 - *“I think we addressed a lot of negative things in this discussion, like what guys have done. But I think for the most part, to be completely honest, we have it pretty good here. ... There’s always going to be that bad apple in the bunch, which is why we have so many alcohol briefs and sexual assault briefs. One person didn’t know his limits and screwed everybody else over. For that we have to suffer the consequences. For the most part out of the 4,000 people, those couple of people ruin it for everyone. But there are people looking out for you, taking care of you here. It definitely shows.” (Female)*
 - *“[USNA has] been around for 160 years. Right now you have four out of the six Joint Chiefs of Staff are Naval Academy graduates. There are parts that are doing something right. We have a limited perspective. We’ve been here two years. Obviously it changes from year to year. Each class has a different experience than the class before. I think there’s a huge shift from stories I’ve read and books I’ve read and from the history and stuff when they started admitting girls and stuff. But even before that and after that there’s—it’s still producing leaders who are doing pretty impressive things. Whether or not those people coming into here already had that kind of persona about them or whether they learned it here, I don’t know. There are still amazing leaders coming out.” (Male)*
 - *“People have a bad view or the media has a bad view of the Naval Academy. But I think a lot of times we’re one of the only schools in the country that really addresses [sexual harassment and assault]. I think that’s worth noting. It’s trying to be handled and that’s why these situations are coming up. At other schools they just overlook them.” (Female)*
 - *“I love being here. It’s a great place to be – not all the time, it has its problems. We complain about stuff. But I’m very happy here. I feel safe.” (Female)*

Chapter 4: U. S. Air Force Academy

Eight focus group sessions were conducted at USAFA between April 17-19. Each session was scheduled for a 90-minute period. There was one session held for each gender for each class year, each with between eight and thirteen students.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment was one of the main subjects addressed in the *SAGR2007* focus groups at USAFA. Cadets were asked to define the type and extent of sexual harassment currently happening at the Academy, possible reasons for it to happen on campus, and the level of tolerance for it. The issue of sexual humor was also investigated during this discussion.

Definition and Examples of Sexual Harassment

- **Participants in the focus groups described sexual harassment as “anything unwanted” that is “verbally focused,” or “anything that makes someone feel uncomfortable.”**
- **When asked for examples of sexual harassment, focus group participants indicated that it could come in many forms, such as jokes, comments, rumors, explicit e-mails, unwanted touching or “sexual favors for a reward.”**
 - *“[Sexual harassment can be] any unwanted sexual-related comments or touching.”* (Female)
 - *“It can be anywhere from a comment to a touch, or, like, off-hand jokes and things like that, that make somebody feel uncomfortable.”* (Female)
 - *“It can be explicit e-mails or just being spoken to in a way that is undesirable.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that it is difficult to give examples of sexual harassment because what is considered unwanted by one person may be acceptable to another.**
 - *“It comes down to how you’re brought up. If you’re from a family with a bunch of brothers, maybe some things don’t bother you. But maybe if you’re, like, an only child with sisters and a feminist mom or something, someone could say something and you would just be so bent out of shape over it.”* (Female)
 - *“It all depends on the mood of the receiver from what I’ve seen. You’ve got to know who you’re talking to. ... There are so many variables that you can’t really draw a line. It’s really hard.”* (Male)

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that unwanted comments can become sexual harassment if the offender does not stop after being asked to do so.**
 - *“The difference between joking and harassment is [that harassment is] persistent or continual. You’re going to hear jokes—they’re just a part of society. So if you ask them to not say those things around you and they stop, then I don’t think it’s harassment. But if they continue to do it ... and they continue to disrespect you, then I think it could be considered harassment.”* (Female)
 - *“A lot of times guys are very crude when it comes to female cadets being gay or not. And that goes way across the line. If they say it in a joking manner, then that’s okay. But a lot of times they pick out girls that you know, and you’re like, ‘No she’s not,’ and they continue pushing it and pushing it. And it becomes offensive at that point. Especially when the girl you know has expressed concern that this is not cool.”* (Female)

Extent of Sexual Harassment on Campus

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that sexual harassment is not a big problem on campus.**
 - *“I don’t feel like it’s a problem that I even worry about or even give any time out of my day or life to thinking about.”* (Female)
 - *“I can’t think of one single experience where I’ve ever seen it, to tell you the truth.”* (Male)
 - *“I personally have never experienced anything that terrible or anything close to it in the four years that I’ve been here.”* (Female)
 - *“My biggest issues, to be honest, are tests. I just had a big test today. So coming here and discussing this wasn’t on my priority list. If I were to graph this, it would have been way at the bottom. It’s obviously been an issue in the past. But to me currently, I haven’t actually seen it or witnessed anything, and have never actually known anybody who has been involved. It’s never been real to me in that sense.”* (Male)
- **Although there may be questionable comments made at the Academy, focus group participants indicated most were not thought to be sexual harassment.**
 - *“I think there are things that bother us, but it wouldn’t be harassment. Like I think all of us can say we’re sick of hearing how ugly cadet girls are or whatever, but it’s not like I’m being harassed.”* (Female)

- *“No one really has an issue with the whole sexual harassment thing. One, we’re so desensitized to it. Two, it’s so commonplace. If it does happen, personally I never notice it. I’m sure it happens every day. I’m sure that I take part in it. But personally, I don’t ever notice it because it just doesn’t phase me as sexual harassment because all of the girls join in too. It’s not just the guys beating down on the girls.”* (Male)

Reasons for Sexual Harassment

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated one reason sexual harassment might happen is that students are not aware they are doing it.**
 - *“A lot of people don’t even know they’re sexually harassing somebody and then they find out that they did. They probably wouldn’t have done it if they had known it was a form of sexual harassment.”* (Male)
 - *“I’ve actually had people come up afterwards and apologize. They’re like, ‘I really didn’t mean to do it.’ And it’s no big deal.”* (Female)
 - *“There are always going to be individuals that just don’t get it. But it’s more because they don’t have that filter or they just don’t understand that you’re serious so they’ll continue joking about it or something. But that’s like a very rare individual.”* (Female)
- **Another possible reason indicated by focus group participants for sexual harassment is that women sometimes send mixed messages to the men regarding what is and is not acceptable.**
 - *“Half the girls in my squad don’t appreciate some of the stuff the guys say, but the other half enjoy it and join in. So the guys assume, ‘Hey they all enjoy this. We can do whatever we want.’ Then even if we say something, they think, ‘Oh, it’s not that big a deal.’”* (Female)
 - *“I think sometimes we have a tendency to treat it almost like a joke. Like, ‘Ha-ha, you shouldn’t say that anymore,’ rather than just saying, ‘Hey that really bothers me, please don’t do it anymore.’ There’s a difference. ... You have to say it in a certain way so it’s clear, like, ‘Yes, this seriously offends me.’”* (Female)

Tolerance of Sexual Harassment

- **Female participants in the focus groups indicated that behavior with the potential to become harassment is often tolerated because it is not viewed as being serious enough to warrant taking action.**

- *“It’s typical guy behavior.”* (Female)
- *“You have to remember that the guys here are college boys. So they do make dirty jokes and occasionally they make lewd comments. But at the same time, most of the time they’re joking. It’s rare that they’re serious about what they’re saying.”* (Female)
- *“I think it’s just a lack of social skills on their part. They just forget everything, all manners. It’s not sexual harassment, I don’t think.”* (Female)
- *“I’m not easily excited about that kind of stuff. I just get over it. It’s easy. I’m in the military. I get used to it.”* (Female)
- **If the behavior is “really sexual harassment,” however, participants in the focus groups indicated that it is not tolerated at the Academy.**
 - *“Offending somebody is not accepted.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that most women are not afraid to confront another student who makes unwanted comments. When they do, it is felt that the unwanted comments almost always stop.**
 - *“We try not to get offended by the little things. But if we do get offended by something, we let them know because they’ll stop. Most of them are pretty good about stuff like that.”* (Female)
 - *“If you give the image that they can cross the line, if you don’t stand up for yourself, then of course they’re going to do it. That’s just how boys talk. But if you say, ‘I don’t like that, shut up,’ then they will never cross that line again. You have to let people know.”* (Female)
 - *“Most of the times I’ve seen someone actually get offended they say something right there on the spot. The one big time I remember is when bunch of us were standing around CQ [charge of quarters] and there was a female there and someone made a sexual joke and the female was uncomfortable with it. She’s like, ‘That’s not cool, I don’t like that,’ and everyone was just like, ‘Okay,’ and we all just walked away.”* (Male)
- **In some situations, however, focus group participants noted it is difficult to confront an offender.**
 - *“It’s kind of hard for females to say, ‘Cut it out,’ in the middle of formation. ... It’s really hard to approach a huge group.”* (Female)

- *“I think people’s willingness to speak out about it or get people to stop doing it also depends on what year you are. A four degree [freshman] is not going to feel comfortable telling an upperclassman to stop. And I think it also depends on what your job position is. If you have some legitimate authority based on what position you have in the squadron, that can make it easier.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that students often help each other out in situations where sexual harassment could happen.**
 - *“A lot of guys yell at other guys [when they say something offensive].”* (Female)
 - *“If it’s like a big deal and it’s pretty persistent, I think even the guys will say, ‘You need to knock this off; you’re going to get in trouble.’ Everybody’s trying to look out for each other.”* (Female)
 - *“If you hear somebody say something, [you] call them aside and say, ‘Look buddy, that’s out of line. You need to apologize.’”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated that students protect freshmen from situations of sexual harassment or potential sexual harassment.**
 - *“I’ve had an upperclassman say to me in a group of girls, ‘If you guys ever have anything happen to you come straight to me and I’ll take care of it.’ I feel protected by the upperclassmen.”* (Female)
 - *“A lot of the guys are like our brothers. If you’re in a situation where you’re afraid to say something, your brother is obviously going to. For the most part, if something is wrong and you’re too scared to say it, they will.”* (Female)
 - *“We have had four degree [freshman] girls that were visited regularly by upperclassmen out of the squadron. I ... talked to [the girls] about it because I didn’t know which guys it was. They told me that they didn’t want [the guys] to be coming by the room. They just didn’t know what to do. I told them next time they came by, either get me or tell the guys that I’m going to hunt them down ... if they keep coming by. They haven’t been coming by for months now.”* (Male)
 - *“I’ve had times where there have been guys out when the four degrees [freshmen] are required to do certain things and [the guys] will say something inappropriate and I’ll pull them aside and talk to them. And then I’ve gone back and talked to the girls, saying, ‘I’m really sorry that upperclassman said that. I’ve talked to him. He understands and he didn’t mean it that way. But if you’re ever offended by anything, please feel comfortable coming and talking to any of us.’”* (Female)

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that the topic of sexual harassment is so top-of-mind at the Academy that men consciously avoid situations that could lead to sexual harassment and sometimes go out of their way to make sure they are not creating situations which could be misconstrued.**
 - *“It seems like it’s on a lot of guys’ minds not to cross that line, so they stay very far away from it.”* (Female)
 - *“When you know the people around you, then you know if they take offense to [something] or not. You know that there’s a line that you don’t cross.”* (Male)
 - *“I think there was a lot more power over four degrees [freshmen] back before all the sexual assault stuff started going on. It’s like you did everything upperclassmen told you to or else you and your squadron were destroyed for the rest of the semester, and it’s not that way any more. ... We’re not gods any more like they were back then. There are rules, and people are afraid of being turned in for sexual harassment.”* (Female)
 - *“I remember one morning there were three girls who were late to morning minutes. He was just going to let everyone go back to their rooms, but he kept us out there because we were late and we were doing push-ups. And then he realized that it was all girls and he said, ‘There’s just something wrong about dropping only girls.’ He got some guys so that it wasn’t only girls.”* (Female)
- **On the other hand, focus group participants indicated that having sexual harassment be top-of-mind can have detrimental effects on some students.**
 - *“They take such an extreme [view] that it’s no longer helping anybody. It’s just singling people out because they did something stupid or said something without thinking.”* (Female)
 - *It’s something where you’re constantly [thinking], ‘Oh, gosh, am I going to get in trouble because I said something and I didn’t intend it that way?’”* (Female)
- **Although participants in the focus groups indicated that sexual harassment is a rare occurrence, some indicated that it does happen.**
 - *“My squad was doing training for the freshmen and one of the girls was doing bear crawls. She had been in some trouble; she got caught with a guy behind her door. But one of the first comments about her was, ‘Oh, she’s used to being on her knees.’ Everyone laughs. And she had heard it. Her AOC [Air Officer Commanding] was told about it. But nothing got done. Nothing ever will be done.”* (Male)

- *“To totally get rid of it, they would have to ‘re-culturize’ everyone.”* (Female)

Sexual Humor

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that sexual humor occurs, but usually not to the extent that it causes problems.**
 - *“[Joking] is probably more common than actual assault, but I don’t think, as far as severity or whatever, it’s a big deal.”* (Female)
 - *“It varies from person to person, but it doesn’t seem like many people get offended [by sexual humor], at least not openly.”* (Male)
 - *“When they make jokes and stuff, it’s not like during class or during briefings or anything. They’re just doing it when you’re sitting in the room and you are all just hanging out.”* (Female)
 - *“I’ve been to other colleges before and there are so many more jokes there. In comparison, this place is really professional.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that sexual humor crosses the line and becomes offensive when it targets a specific person or group of people.**
 - *“It crosses the line when it targets a specific person. If they’re just making a general joke like, ‘Why do women have smaller feet than men? So they can stand closer to the sink,’ that’s a joke. It may not be the best joke or the most appropriate joke, but it’s when it singles out a certain person that it crosses the line.”* (Female)
 - *“If the guys are talking about girls overall in the whole population it’s funny. But when they’re talking about girls that you know and your friends, that bothers me.”* (Female)
 - *“I send a lot of the locker-room jokes to my fiancé and to girls in my squad, and they think they are some of the funniest things they’ve ever read in their lives. I think when it’s used in that context, it’s not offensive. But when you’re aiming it towards someone or a certain group of people, that’s crossing the line.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated that sexual humor also crosses the line and becomes offensive when it happens in a professional setting.**
 - *“People tell jokes a lot to the whole group when we’re in formation. And that’s sometimes when I get offended. Just being insensitive to their audience and maybe not screening [what they say]. It might be an appropriate joke if you’re*

saying it one-on-one with someone you know won't be offended by it. But in that professional setting, when you're standing there in formation, that's really the only time that I've been offended by humor." (Female)

- *"CME [Cadet Military Education] is probably not the best place for it. My squad lacks professionalism and I've always cared [about that]." (Female)*

Safety and Sexual Assault and Harassment

During the USAFA focus groups, the topic of sexual assault came up at various times, especially when discussing the issue of safety on campus. Besides talking about the definition of sexual assault, cadets were asked to discuss how often it happens, and why cadets may or may not feel safe on Academy grounds.

Definition and Frequency of Sexual Assault

- **Focus group participants indicated that they typically consider sexual assault to be an "attack" that is "physical" in nature, such as rape.**
- **Focus group participants indicated that sexual assault is not a big issue at the Academy and it happens less frequently than it does at other colleges.**
 - *"I think they're pretty minimal right now from the numbers that we've been getting over the last year and a half to two years. There haven't been many occurrences, from what we understand. It seems like it's been getting better. They must be doing something right." (Male)*
 - *"I went to another university last year, and that's an awful place for all of this, and you never hear about that." (Male)*
 - *"I think the leadership of the Academy, the officers or whatever, make a way bigger deal of it [than they need to]. Granted, they have to because of the news, or if someone finds out about it, it's a big thing. They have to watch their back. ... [But] honestly, this school is way better off than any of the other civilian schools close by." (Female)*

Feelings of Safety

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they generally felt safe from sexual assault on campus, especially in the cadet area where "there's security everywhere."**

- “You may not feel as safe [in the areas open to the public], but I personally feel safe everywhere in the cadet area. There’s almost always people around.” (Female)
- “For the most part, what I hear from women here is that they don’t have that much fear of walking into the parking lot in the dark and randomly getting assaulted by somebody.” (Male)
- “I would say I trust 99.9 percent of the guys here. Like if something happened to my car and I was pulled over to the side of the road and someone else pulled over and he had an Academy sticker on it and he said, ‘I’ll give you a ride,’ I’d jump in that car, no problem.” (Male)
- **Some women in the focus groups indicated that they are more afraid of an animal attacking them than they are of a person attacking them.**
 - “I hate the walk from the visitor center to the chapel. It’s got hardly any lights and I’m always terrified of wildlife.” (Female)
 - “I’ll be out running and there will be this huge elk running and I’ll be, like, ‘Oh, God, I’ll be going up a tree!’ In the parking lot you see these glowing eyes from underneath the brush, and I feel like I’m being stalked by a mountain lion.” (Female)
- **Some women in the focus groups, however, identified outdoor places on campus where they were not totally comfortable going after dark.**
 - “Going up the path to the visitor center is a little creepy at night.” (Female)
 - “If it’s stormy and you have to take the Ho Chi Minh,²³⁵ which means you have to walk around the base of the building instead of walking on the terrazzo, there’s this section where it’s like the garage and there are construction workers down there. If you’re alone it can be a little bit creepy.” (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated they generally felt safe in the dorms, and did not feel a need to lock their doors at night on a regular basis.**
 - “There is a dorm patrol that’s responsible for going around in the dorms. They walk through. And they’re in charge of the whole cadet area. If they hear that

²³⁵ The “Ho Chi Minh” refers to the path on the USAFA campus that follows the road in-between the dining facility and the academic facility.

something is up, they have a car and they can go and drive around and check up on stuff.” (Female)

- *“The walls in the dorms are paper thin. I can hear the people in the next room having a conversation if they get even above normal speaking tones at all. So I’m not necessarily worried that I’m going to be attacked in my room. I’m pretty sure everyone could hear me.” (Female)*
- *“[I don’t think someone would come into my room while I was sleeping] because you’ve got your roommate in there too. ... The odds are that they’re not going to do anything.” (Female)*
- *“I think the way they have the girls grouped around the bathrooms, that actually helps some.” (Male)*
- **Focus group participants also indicated that they felt safe off base and during summer experiences as long as they were with other cadets.**
 - *“I think among cadet groups the cadets are more likely to watch out for each other when they’re away from the Academy.” (Male)*

Reasons for Not Feeling Safe

- **When asked why some students might not feel safe at the Academy, some female participants in the focus groups indicated that they have had incidents with workers from the contract custodian that caused them to feel somewhat uneasy.**
 - *“I’ve had some really sketchy experiences with contract custodian workers. For instance, this one guy came up to me and was going on and on about how he thought this one girl in my squad was so hot and how he loved blondes and how he felt like he deserved somebody. And it was really uncomfortable.” (Female)*
 - *“There was one worker who was like, making threats. Not real threats – this guy was tiny. He really wasn’t a threat. But he scared my roommate to death. She was completely freaked out. He was just going on and he chased her down the hall one day.” (Female)*
- **Focus group participants also indicated that the possibility of having a man enter a woman’s room after a night of drinking was another possible reason for feeling unsafe.**
 - *“Some people will come back drunk from Hap’s [cadet sports bar]. ... Last year my roommate was in our room alone because I was out that night, and a guy just*

decided to come in at 2:00 in the morning and he was drunk and he just started talking to her.” (Female)

- *“I remember when I was a freshman and senior girls would be like, ‘Ladies, lock your doors because this guy’s drunk.’ We wouldn’t go out in the hall. I don’t know if I felt unsafe, but you just take precautions by locking your door.” (Female)*
- *“I remember one time a whole bunch of seniors came back drunk and [the sophomores in our squad] made sure our doors were locked, so that the guys wouldn’t come in. ... They made sure that we knew to just stay in our rooms and ignore them.” (Female)*
- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that a person might feel unsafe when they were around certain people.**
 - *“I think it depends on who you hang out with, because if I were hanging out with certain individuals, I wouldn’t feel safe. But I know not to associate myself with them. I won’t give specifics, but possibly certain sports teams.” (Female)*
 - *“There’s this person I know who has ninja stars – sharp metal objects and throwing knives. That’s really weird to me. Because I think this person’s creepy to begin with. And it really creeps me out that she has weapons.” (Female)*
 - *“I’m a PEER [Personal Ethics and Education Representative] in the squad, and I had to deal with a 21 year old who feels that she is allowed to have outrageous temper tantrums that you would see from a psychotic three year old. You just say one thing [wrong] and she’d start screaming. She threw her iron against her valet and shattered her mirrors. She threatened to kill her roommate.” (Female)*
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated other reasons for a student to potentially feel unsafe.**
 - Something happened to them in the past: *“I think you might find if you looked at each case individually that a lot of the people who said [they don’t feel safe] might have had something happen in the past.” (Male)*
 - They do not have a strong support network: *“People who feel more isolated and don’t have good friends or don’t feel like they can reach out and talk to people when they need to [may feel unsafe].” (Male)*
 - Their squad is less strict about enforcing rules: *“My squad is really laid back and chilled, so people don’t break the rules but people can push the rules more*

in my squad than they can in other squads. So personally, I would say that the females in my squad might be more inclined to say they fear stuff, than females in a real strict squadron.” (Male)

Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Discussions about reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault focused on several areas: how well the cadets understood their reporting options, their reporting decision and preferred reporting method, and possible reasons for not reporting an incident. Cadets were also questioned about how much they trusted the reporting system at USAFA.

Reporting Options

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they have a number of resources to call on should they become a victim of sexual harassment or sexual assault.**
 - *“I think there’s plenty of stuff that people can do for counseling because they always beat into our skulls that there are people that you can talk to.” (Female)*
 - *“You can go to the head victim’s advocate lady. You can call her any time and she’ll come talk to you. She’s not a military person so if people are intimidated by their AOC [Air Officer Commanding] or their AOC doesn’t like them, and they don’t want to talk to their flight commanders, she’s kind of like a third-party resource. I think a lot of people know about her – at least the girls do.” (Female)*
- **Most participants in the focus groups indicated that they knew the difference between restricted and unrestricted reporting, although they do not always use those exact terms.**
 - *“Restricted is when nobody’s going to know about it. You just go get help. And unrestricted means that the legal process starts.” (Female)*
 - *“If you want to keep it confidential you can personally call 333-SARC [the phone number of the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator] and then they can gather the evidence without causing an investigation or notifying anyone in your chain of command.” (Female)*
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they knew how to contact a SARC [Sexual Assault Response Coordinator] representative.**
 - *“Every squad has the SARC’s number posted.” (Male)*

- *“During the summer seminar when we come here before our junior year [of high school] they talk to us about SARC. I think I knew the SARC number before I was a senior in high school.”* (Female)

Reasons for Not Reporting

- **When asked why someone might not report an incident of sexual harassment, participants in the focus groups indicated that they would rather handle it on their own or at least keep it to the lowest possible level.**
 - *“We try to solve it on the lowest level. Too many times people get scared or whatever, and skip a whole bunch of people in their chain. It gets blown out of proportion, whereas, in actuality, it could have been solved if you just talked to that person or maybe talked to someone who was directly above that person.”* (Female)
 - *“Usually you just call somebody in your leadership and it’s taken care of within the squad.”* (Female)
 - *“If you turn someone in up your chain of command for a joke or something, I think a lot of people would be like, ‘Why did you do that? That’s so stupid.’”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that there are certain situations when sexual harassment would definitely be reported, such as when an older student harasses a younger student or when someone in authority harasses someone under them.**
 - *“If it’s something to do with power and they’re saying, ‘I’ll do this for you if you do this.’ That would definitely be something I’d send up the chain of command.”* (Female)
 - *“If it’s an upperclassman harassing a freshman, that would definitely be something you can’t really deal with on your own because they outrank you. It’s something you have to take up your chain of command.”* (Female)
 - *“If sexual assault has occurred or sexual harassment by someone who is in charge of you, [you should] take it outside the unit because the chain is obviously messed up.”* (Male)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they would be more likely to report sexual assault than sexual harassment, but some indicated that if alcohol were involved they might not even report a sexual assault.**

- *“The repercussions of underage drinking are far worse than the consequences of sexual assault.”* (Female)
- *“If you get caught drinking they kick you out for it but they take you through an Article 15.²³⁶ Since we’re technically in the military, we’re discharged, but not necessarily honorable. When those incidents happen it screws up the rest of your life.”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that another possible reason for not reporting a sexual assault is that the victim might go through a significant amount of emotional trauma and might not want to deal with the reporting process.**
 - *“It’s embarrassing to let people know that they’ve put themselves in the situation where something like that would happen. It’s like being judged for being stupid or just not having the foresight to make sure you’re in a good situation.”* (Female)
 - *“From an emotional aspect, I’m sure that a lot of people would just feel really bad about it or ashamed and not want to talk about it.”* (Male)
 - *“It seems like after something like that happens, there’s a lot of weird psychological things going on in the girls’ heads. They think it’s their fault. They feel guilty about it. Actually, one of the briefings we had when I was a freshman in 2002 or 2003 compelled one of my good friends to come to me and tell me that something happened to her in high school. And she had convinced herself that even though it’s absolutely obvious she had no fault in it, she had convinced herself that it was her fault.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants also indicated the following reasons why someone might not report a sexual assault.**
 - **Labeling of the victim:** *“Because of the stigma of being a rat, of ratting on somebody else. Or the stigma of being a rape victim. Everyone looks at you and says, ‘That’s the girl that was raped.’ ... That defines you and a lot of people don’t want that.”* (Male)
 - **Time commitment:** *“If I get going on this then I’m going to have to go to court, make all of these statements. What are my priorities?”* (Male)

²³⁶ Military nonjudicial punishment.

- Wish to avoid getting a fellow cadet kicked out: “[Maybe the victims] are nice people and they know that if they actually go forward and say anything, the guy will go to jail. It’s going to ruin his life. He made a mistake; he doesn’t deserve to be on a list for the rest of his life and never get a job. They’d rather deal with it themselves.” (Male)
- Do not want to have the whole wing punished: “That’s something that happens a lot at the Academy, like blanket punishments for the mistakes of a few. During the knowledge tests earlier in the year, I know some people that did cheat, and one of their reasons for cheating was that they didn’t want their entire squadron to be restricted because they failed, and they were struggling with it.” (Female)

Reporting Decision and Preferred Reporting Method

- **If they were to experience an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault, participants in the focus groups indicated that they would talk to their friends before anyone else.**
 - “As far as cadet females, we have a good support group. ... It’s not like you’re the lone girl out there. Even if you don’t have a lot of friends in the squad, hopefully everybody has friends on a team or somebody like that.” (Female)
 - “If it was an assault, I would probably just mentally shut down and block everything off. I would talk to my roommate and it may be a situation where I would need to depend on her to [tell me what to do].” (Female)
- **After talking to friends, participants in the focus groups indicated that they might also go to other confidants on an informal basis, such as a chaplain, Personal Ethics and Education Representative (PEER) counselor, teacher, or coach.**
- **If they decided that an incident of sexual assault or sexual harassment needed to be formally reported, some participants in the focus groups indicated they would report the incident to a person in their cadet chain of command, such as their element leader or flight commander.**
 - “I probably wouldn’t take [harassment] up my [official] chain unless it was really, really, really bad. I’d go talk to them. I’d go talk to my best friend and then I’d go to one of their friends to get them to talk. Then I might go to my element leader or to the flight commander. But other than that, I wouldn’t want to take it up any further.” (Female)
 - “If I was afraid to go up my [official] chain of command, we have something called the first sergeants in the squad. ... Even though I don’t really know either

of them personally, I don't think I would really have a problem going up and talking to them." (Female)

- **Other participants in the focus groups indicated they would report it to someone in their official chain of command, such as their Academy Military Training (AMT) or their Air Officer Commanding (AOC).**
 - *"I would feel really comfortable going to my AOC and talking to him."* (Male)
 - *"If it is going to go up the chain anyway, you may as well skip the senior or upperclassman. They can't do anything about it."* (Male)
 - *"I would take my friends and go to my flight commander, unless it was a really, really personal serious issue. Then I would skip the chain of command and I would go straight to my AOC."* (Female)
 - *"And that's one less person that knows. Because if you're sexually assaulted or whatever, you don't want a whole lot of people to know."* (Male)
- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated they would not hesitate to talk to a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) representative if they decided to go the confidential reporting route, especially for a sexual assault.**
 - *"I think a SARC is a good outlet because ... sometimes it's easier to say stuff when you can't see the person's face."²³⁷* (Female)
 - *"If it were a straight up assault, I think people would go right to the SARC."* (Female)
 - *"I definitely think a SARC is good for the sexual assault kinds of things where you don't necessarily want to talk to the people in your squad because they know both people and there's always going to be people who take one side or the other. SARC is great when you need that neutral person."* (Female)
 - *"They're professionals at what they're doing, counseling, or whatever. And if you were having an issue, I would think that they could help you out for sure."* (Female)

²³⁷ Sexual Assault Response Coordinators may be contacted by phone, which means that cadets can discuss incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment without "seeing the person's face."

- **Other participants in the focus groups indicated they would avoid calling a SARC representative because they would not be comfortable discussing the incident with someone they do not know personally.**
 - *“I think you need to know the person to some degree. How are you supposed to confide in somebody you’ve never met?”* (Male)
 - *“The whole counseling thing, they kind of talk to you and ask you some questions to kind of get to know you. I would really rather avoid all those questions and talk to someone who already knows me.”* (Female)
 - *“I wouldn’t want them calling me back, following up. That makes it kind of official.”* (Female)

- **When deciding how they would report an incident of sexual harassment or assault, participants in the focus groups indicated that it comes down to finding someone they trust.**
 - *“It’s all about your chain of command and whether or not you feel it’s going to be dealt with properly if you go to that person.”* (Male)
 - *“You’re going to go to whoever you’re comfortable talking about that sort of thing with. There are lots of people around here. Lots of respectful guys and girls in our lives, professors, AOCs [Air Officers Commanding], whatever.”* (Male)
 - *“I think all of us either know some sort of AMT/AOC [Academy Military Trainer or Air Officer Commanding] that we trust or we have a friend that has an AOC/AMT that we can trust.”* (Female)
 - *“That’s kind of what one cadet did when she went straight to her squadron commander, because her element leader was best friends with the guy who was in her face and all of that. So she didn’t, like, try to take it up to her element leader or flight commander. She just went to the person she felt most comfortable with, who she knew would take care of it.”* (Female)

- **Some second class female participants in the focus groups, several of whom were Personal Ethics and Education Representative (PEER) counselors, indicated that students tend to avoid discussing sexual harassment and sexual assault incidents with PEER counselors.**
 - *“If I was sexually assaulted or harassed, I’m not going to go to someone in my squadron who has the title of PEER, I’m going to go to my best friends or my parents. [We PEER counselors are] there for the people who are so desperate*

and so friendless that we're all they have, basically. It's sad, but it's true. That's the program." (Female)

- *"It's natural instinct. You're not going to go to someone you don't know very well."* (Female)

Trust in Reporting System

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they would have enough faith in the reporting system to trust that justice would be done in cases of sexual harassment or sexual assault.**
- **Third and fourth class (sophomores and freshmen) participants in the focus groups indicated that they have very little experience with the reporting system, but that they have no reason not to trust it.**
 - *"Judging on the extent that they're trying to prevent things, you'd think that they'd take it even more seriously when it actually happens. I'm talking about all of the briefings that we've had, all of the rules that they make with having a wing man.²³⁸ If it actually happened, I would expect that it would really be a huge issue for them."* (Male)
- **Some first and second class (seniors and juniors) participants in the focus groups indicated that they have been around since the publicized assault cases a few years ago and that the reporting system has improved since then.**
 - *"I think things have changed for the better. Much more attention is given to issues like this. The fact that I'm sitting in this room is evidence of that. And I think that things are dealt with much more promptly, though I'm sure it's not perfect yet."* (Male)
 - *"There's less doubt in the system [now]. I think that if somebody comes to me, that I'm not going to have to worry about someone saying, 'Shhhh,' when I'm trying to take care of a problem with a friend or a subordinate or a peer who has been sexually assaulted. [The times I have dealt with the system] it was – I mean, I don't want to say easy, but it was easy. It was so easy to take care of."* (Male)
 - *"There's definitely been a shift in culture from blaming the victim to 'Oh, wait, this environment does exist. We can take care of it ourselves.'"* (Male)

²³⁸ "Wing man" refers to a friend who watches out for your best interests.

- **Some participants in the focus groups indicated that they were frustrated by the fact that the reporting system appears biased in favor of the victim and against the accused in a sexual assault case, especially when alcohol is involved.**
 - *“In my law class we read a couple of cases on that. It seems like in some cases, somebody can just accuse somebody else and it’s their word against the other person’s and usually the accuser wins. In both cases that we read, the defendant didn’t have a chance, basically. He said, ‘No I didn’t do it.’ She said, ‘Yeah, you did it, you were drunk.’ And he got convicted of rape.”* (Male)
 - *“It’s not fair for the person who did the assault because if both parties consent, it’s still rape because the victim couldn’t exercise good judgment. And so it puts [the accused] in an unfair position.”* (Female)
 - *“When the girl lies, I don’t think justice is ever done to the guy. The guy has the worst year of his life and it never really bothered her. ... But then you don’t want to get her on it, because that will scare other girls away from coming forward who are legitimately assaulted.”* (Male)
- **Some first class (senior) female participants in the focus groups indicated that they were somewhat wary of the sexual assault reporting system because of experiences at the base hospital.**
 - *“I know someone who went through a sexual assault and she went to the base hospital and they didn’t even have a rape kit there. So this person is traumatized and they told her she has to drive downtown and go to the hospital there. And the person is like, ‘I don’t want to go.’”* (Female)
 - *“The thing about the system that makes me sketchy is the sensitivity of the hospital. Like even when you went to the clinic, you’re like, yeah, I want to go on birth control pills or I need the morning after pill. I’ve had friends that have had to go and do that. That’s a scary thing to have to do to start. And, I mean, the people down there have been so callous. They’re, like, do you realize that this isn’t a form of birth control? You know, where are your morals? And, I mean, just things like that. It absolutely shocked me when they told me that that’s what happened at the hospital. Because that should never happen. You’re going there because you need some sort of support. And so just because of that experience, I would be very skeptical of ever sending one of my friends to a military—especially the cadet—clinic, after having an experience like that.”* (Female)

Training

The goal of the discussion on training was to determine the methods of sexual harassment and sexual assault training that are most and least effective with cadets. Cadets were also given a chance to voice their own suggestions regarding how training should be conducted at USAFA.

Type and Amount of Training

- **Whether they liked the training or not, some participants in the focus groups indicated that much of the sexual harassment and sexual assault training they currently receive is focused on response: what to do when an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault happens.**
 - *“The training that we get is really good on telling us what it is and knowing how to report it. I think every girl needs to know that, and guys.”* (Female)
 - *“It teaches you how to deal with sexual assault and sexual harassment problems by the book. But you would never use that in real life. It’s not applicable.”* (Male)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they received too much training on sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“We get an endless amount of briefings.”* (Male)
 - *“I think we have a briefing at least every month, maybe every other week about sexual assault and sexual harassment. And it gets to the point that we’re so overexposed that we don’t even care anymore. We’re, like, ‘Oh my God, another one.’”* (Female)
 - *“We talk about it a lot. It’s too much training. People are tired of listening to it.”* (Female)
 - *“There’s only so much they can teach you, and you only need one or two lessons on it. And then the rest is yourself. You take it upon yourself not to do something retarded.”* (Male)
 - *“For 99% of the people here, you don’t need to tell us five times not to sexually assault someone. You’re just wasting my time.”* (Male)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that too much training might make students take the issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault less seriously than they should.**

- *“I think when you talk about it way too much then people start making fun of it.”* (Female)
- *“Even for this meeting, [the joke was], ‘Sexual assault training. Does that mean we’re learning to be sexually assaulted?’”* (Female)
- *“I have a friend who was sexually assaulted. ... With all these briefings people joke about it and guys don’t take it seriously. Girls don’t take it seriously. And that really hurts her.”* (Female)
- **Some of the older students in the focus groups, however, indicated that the Academy has lightened up on training in recent years.**
 - *“I think they’re doing a pretty good job. Right after it happened—like I said, I’ve been here for a little while—and right after it happened, I think they definitely kind of overkilled the topic. It seemed like once a week we were having a briefing on it, sexual assault prevention, and what to do, and how to keep it from happening and all of that stuff. You know, they definitely did overkill on it. But now I think they’ve lightened up a lot more. I think they’re doing a good job of kind of starting to taper away from it. I mean, we’re still having the sexual assault prevention briefings and stuff like that, which I find very useful. I went [to a civilian university] and I wish they would have done stuff like that there.”* (Male)

Most Effective Training Methods

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that some of the most effective training sessions on sexual harassment and sexual assault involved speakers who shared real life experiences.**
 - *“If we have somebody speaking about something that happened to them, it really hits everybody.”* (Female)
 - *“In our regular-scheduled briefings their aim is to brainwash us and get canned answers out of us. So they’ll ask us a question and they’re expecting us to say an answer and we all do because we’ve heard it so many times. But [the speakers] aren’t looking for answers, they are just looking to tell us their story. They just want to plant the seed in our head that this is real; this does happen.”* (Female)
 - *“It’s a lot easier to stay awake during the ones where it’s like personal stories and people stand up and relate their experiences. That’s pretty much how you measure effectiveness in the cadet wing, whether or not cadets are sleeping through it or whether they are awake through it.”* (Male)

- *“I think the trainings that are more effective are when you bring in people that had some sort of personal experience because then it will hit home more with you. Someone who either was assaulted and then is okay talking about it or someone like the lawyer who was on that case and had personal experience. Then you can relate to them more and you actually give their argument some weight because they have this experience with it.”* (Male)
- **First class (senior) focus group participants indicated that they especially liked the presentation given by a lawyer who told the story of a sexual assault case he worked on, asking for the opinions of students along the way. They liked it because the lawyer connected well with the audience and got them thinking about the issues.**
 - *“He brought a sense of realism to the issue, things that you really have to consider that you may not even have thought [about]. It was a situation where you can kind of see it from both sides and you can understand the importance of trying to be on the good side, giving yourself some room so that mistakes don’t happen, and taking precautions so that you don’t even find yourself in that situation.”* (Male)
 - *“He was one of the rare briefings where cadets went in knowing it was a sexual assault briefing. They were already tuning out and ready to take a nap [and he got them] to tune back in and come out of their shell. So that was impressive because that’s pretty hard to do with cadets.”* (Male)
 - *“It really showed the unclearness of the situations that you can get into. It teaches you to be really careful. ... That was a really good one because it caused you to think. It was a good story.”* (Female)
 - *“We took a vote at the end, whether we thought it was sexual assault or a rape or something. And that actually generated some real conversations because you had people on both sides of the issue and friends discussing it during the briefing, rather than just sitting there like zombies.”* (Female)
- **Whether formal or informal, participants in the focus groups indicated that they liked training sessions which allowed them to interact with each other on the topics of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“There was one session where they put the females in one room and the males in another and then they had a really good discussion about it at the end. And I thought that was pretty effective in comparison to the PowerPoint briefings.”* (Male)

- “[One presentation] was interactive and it was really good. I enjoyed it because I think it kept everybody attentive.” (Female)
- “I found [the case studies] more useful than some of the mass briefings we’ve had. For one, I felt like it taught more because we actually had some interaction with it.” (Male)
- “I remember our peers in our freshman squad took us in a room and they talked to us about sexual harassment and sexual assault. Hearing it from a cadet was a lot better, like an older cadet who had gone through it, and just being amongst your peers and being able to talk about it was much better than being in a huge mass briefing.” (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that the Air Force movie that was presented in several parts made an impression on many fourth class (freshmen) students, although the women tended to find it more effective than the men.**
 - “[It showed] the bystanders and the people who were kind of like egging on the guy and people who just didn’t care. And they talked about ... if the bystanders had just done a little bit something different, the situation could have turned out different. I thought that was pretty effective.” (Female)
 - “The characters stayed the same, and we probably watched three different sessions over three different months. ... Now if you have a guy friend, and there’s another guy around, he’s apt to say, ‘Oh, that’s a Frank.’” (Female)
 - “[The video with the enlisted people] was one of those things where you’re like, ‘That would never happen.’ But I remember it, so maybe it worked in some way.” (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated that they had mixed opinions regarding the effectiveness of the training video that described a sexual assault on a male victim, but it was very memorable for all first class (seniors) students in the focus groups who saw it.**
 - “I don’t know if it was effective. It definitely wasn’t good. You definitely left feeling just sick.” (Male)
 - “The guys felt so uncomfortable. That was the only briefing that really hit home with them. They came out of there and they were, like, squeamish. And I’m like, ‘Now you get it.’” (Female)
 - “It was the first time a lot of guys afterwards said to me, ‘Oh, that’s how girls must feel.’” (Female)

Least Effective Training Methods

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that repetitive PowerPoint presentations were among the least effective methods of training on the topics of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“The first couple of [PowerPoint] briefings were actually informative, but then they just started beating you over the head with it.”* (Female)
 - *“They could have a refresher briefing every year. But you do not need to know every time you go to a briefing that the counseling center is always there, you can always talk to PEERS, you can talk to the chaplain, and that this is the number for SARC [Sexual Assault Response Coordinator].”* (Female)
 - *“PowerPoint is usually not good. It makes me fall asleep. Most people are just cynical about it. They just do their homework.”* (Female)
 - *“[PowerPoint] briefings just reduce the impact of the good briefings. When you have [a good briefing] it makes an impact. But then two weeks later you have a PowerPoint briefing and it’s like it brings you back. Because everyone goes in half asleep.”* (Female)
- **Male participants in the focus groups indicated that another ineffective method of training for them was to have a speaker who caused them to feel “accused.”**
 - *“[One speaker] we had my four degree year [freshman year]. She had come to talk to us and basically, she just bashed on men the entire time. So by the end, the guys were, ‘Just forget you, we’re out of here. We don’t really care what you have to say anymore.’”* (Male)
 - *“The least effective is when they come and try to guilt-trip you. They bring somebody in and it’s, like, you’re a terrible person because you’re a male. ... It’s, like, you’re white, you’re male, and I was raped by a white male, so you’re a horrible person.”* (Male)
- **Some juniors in the focus groups indicated they disliked the online Air Force training they were required to take because they felt it was too long and not appropriate for those who have already received a significant amount of sexual harassment and sexual assault training.**
 - *“It was horrible.”* (Female)
 - *“If we did something like that the four degree year [freshman year], that would be fine. You get all the definitions and go through scenarios. But when you’re*

doing it two years in, after you've already done the briefings, [it's not good]."
(Female)

Suggested Training Options

- **Focus groups participants indicated that some variety would improve the training they receive on sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *"The more variety we have in these briefings and information sessions, the better. People respond to different things differently. To reach a wider range of people, just vary it up."* (Female)
 - *"Maybe if you have different types of people or different situations or personal stories with different sexes, then it won't feel so repetitive."* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that training would be valuable, especially for freshmen, on how victims can take care of sexual harassment on their own so it does not have to be formally reported.**
 - *"The one thing they could really do that would be so simple is say, 'Girls, stop putting up with guys joking like that.' All you have to do is say, 'Stop that. I really don't appreciate it.' Then it, for the most part, stops."* (Female)
 - *"A girl could say to a girl in the incoming freshmen classes, 'Don't let them push you around about anything, about standards, about sexual stuff, about why you should be here, anything.'"* (Female)
 - *"I think there needs to be an emphasis that if you're offended, it's up to you to take care of it. Because I don't see that being taught. It's not taught that [the victim] has a responsibility to do something about it. If they let it go once, then it becomes accepted."* (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated that some men would welcome a training session that has a stronger focus on prevention instead of response, or a stronger focus on how to recognize sexual harassment.**
 - *"From what I've seen from the briefings, it seems like we really only get [information about] response, if it happens this is what you need to do. I think it would be really helpful for a lot of the guys [to hear] the prevention side of it. Say, 'This is what you need to do to stay out of trouble and here's the line that you can't cross.'"* (Male)

- *“It seems like the majority of the training that we get is on sexual assault. ... That goes back to how we don’t even realize that [sexual harassment] is going on. ... I might just be clueless on the subject.”* (Male)
- **Some women in the focus groups indicated they would like to have more mixed-gender training sessions, but others preferred same-gender sessions.**
 - *“[When we were together] it helped because we could see their reactions and they could see our reactions and it kind of blended more so you could understand the thought process.”* (Female)
 - *“Without males in the room I feel that the females are more willing to voice their opinions and say how they really feel because the guys aren’t there to think something about them.”* (Female)
- **Some fourth class (freshmen) women in the focus groups indicated interest in having training sessions in mixed age groups so they can learn from the experiences of older female students.**
 - *“At the beginning of the year, two upperclassmen called all the freshmen in our squadron into their room and kind of warned us about frat [fraternization] and upperclassmen and all that stuff. It was just good to hear their stories.”* (Female)
- **Some first class (senior) women in the focus groups indicated a preference for training sessions which address the problem in a general way, but would not be called sexual harassment/assault briefings.**
 - *“We’re smart. We can make connections. They could bring in people that just talk about standing up for something that was wrong. It doesn’t matter what it is. ... It doesn’t always have to be labeled and specifically aimed towards sexual harassment.”* (Female)
 - *“Sexual assault is only one of a multitude of issues that we’re dealing with here. It just seems unfair to focus on one issue over the other, and when it all comes down to it, it’s almost the same issue but highlighted in different areas.”* (Female)
 - *“[We had one speaker who is a rape victim, but we didn’t know that going into the briefing.] ... I liked how rape wasn’t the focus. ... The focus was on being strong and standing up for what you believe in ... and having that power inside you. And I remember being really affected by that.”* (Female)

- **Older students in the focus groups indicated that they could get by with less training altogether on sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“I feel like as firsties [seniors], we should probably be done with it. You can get it all in your first two years here and then after that you just understand, ‘Okay, this is what I do, this is what I don’t do.’ I don’t think we keep needing to be refreshed. It’s kind of overkill.”* (Female)
 - *“The upperclassmen have heard it so many times that you’re going to lose everybody the instant you announce a briefing.”* (Female)

Leadership Preparation

After talking about training in general, cadets were asked to discuss how well they are being trained to deal with sexual harassment and assault in a leadership capacity when they graduate and enter active duty.

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they were getting a variety of experiences at the Academy which would help prepare them to deal with sexual harassment and sexual assault as an officer.**
 - *“We had one briefing once where they talked about how to be an effective listener when someone is telling you their story.”* (Female)
 - *“That’s the whole purpose of why we’re here, to learn how to deal with people and learn how to at least be sympathetic to their situations. We’re getting all these trainings and briefings so that we understand that out in the real world we’re going to encounter things.”* (Female)
 - *“My law teacher is real good. She tells us what things we can do and what we should do when we have airmen under us.”* (Female)
 - *“In the behavioral science briefing, you go over how to counsel—what our role really is, how not to overstep your role, when to tell someone to go to someone else and when you can deal with it.”* (Female)
 - *“By being an element leader in basic training you’re really the command authority. ... Your freshmen will come to you if something’s really, really wrong. So that’s probably the closest you’re going to get to hands-on commander [training].”* (Female)
- **Some focus group participants indicated that no additional training was needed on topics dealing with sexual harassment and sexual assault in a leadership capacity.**

- *“I don’t think it’s something that we need to be taught. I think that it’s just having the opportunity to interact, and I think everyone here, at some point in their life, interacts with other cadets both above and below them in a way that will help them [later].”* (Female)
- *“Reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment is almost the exact same channel here and on active duty. There’s a SARC [Sexual Assault Response Coordinator] at every base. So it’s almost the exact same channels.”* (Male)
- **Other focus group participants, however, would like additional training of this type.**
 - *“I think they can do more as far as the legal side of who you need to contact and how you need to go about getting started investigating that person.”* (Male)
 - *“Here it’s just call SARC [Sexual Assault Response Coordinator] and be done with it. When you’re commanding somebody, you’re going to be involved with it. And the Academy ... doesn’t do anything to help you prepare for that.”* (Male)
 - *“I think another important thing, too, is maybe show actual situations that have happened, like, just—instead of hypothetical ones. And a big problem in the deploy locations is like male-on-male rape. But we don’t hear about that, you know, and learn about it. So as a leader, how are you going to deal with that, if you don’t think about it ever happening?”* (Female)
 - *“It would be nice if they took two or three lessons out and designated those entirely on bringing people in that have dealt with [real life] situations like that. Bringing people from the crisis center and having them talk for part of the class and then have a class discussion on how you would deal with it as a leader.”* (Female)

Communication From the Academy

Cadets were asked to evaluate the type and amount of communication they currently receive from the Academy regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault. They were also given an opportunity to make suggestions on how to improve communication at the Academy.

Current Communication About Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

- **Focus group participants indicated that e-mail was the Academy’s main form of communication to students about incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**

- “[The e-mails] say so-and-so is under investigation for sexual assault. ... It’s kind of mixed in with all of the other problems, like the honor cases. Like [they may say] there are three honor cases, two sexual assault cases, and one OTF²³⁹ case.” (Female)
- “They always try to make sure we know, so that way no rumors get started.” (Male)
- “Usually if it goes up to an Article 32 hearing²⁴⁰ and they have to investigate, that’s when we hear something.” (Female)
- **Some focus group participants indicated that they appreciated these e-mail communications and felt that Lt. Gen. Regni, the Superintendent of the Air Force Academy, has done a good job of keeping them informed.**
 - “Whenever there’s a sexual assault case going on, like going to trial, General Regni usually tells the wing [all cadets as a group] what’s going on because he doesn’t want rumors running rampant. He’ll usually tell us, ‘A cadet is going to go up on UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] action. We don’t know whether [he’s] guilty or innocent. Don’t assume anything. We’re just letting you know.’” (Female)
 - “One thing I have appreciated is, like with the honor scandal, General Regni did confront us all before it went public. I appreciated that, because then I felt like I knew what was going on. Even though it didn’t really impact me, it impacted the Academy. And I guess now that I think about it, there have been a couple of e-mails that he has sent out telling us that there were a couple of cadets under investigation.” (Male)
- **Some participants in the focus groups, however, indicated that they would prefer to receive information about incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault in person rather than via e-mail. Some suggested that a good time to receive the information verbally would be during squadron time, breakfast, or roll call.**
 - “I don’t think the e-mails are very effective because we get so many and you get so tired of reading them. You can tell it’s a form e-mail and you just automatically delete it.” (Female)

²³⁹ Over the fence, an unauthorized absence.

²⁴⁰ Military equivalent of a grand jury hearing.

- **Focus group participants indicated that, in addition to e-mail, information about incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault is sometimes given to students in their squadrons.**
 - *“In our squadron, if something major happens, like if there’s someone who ends up with Article 15²⁴¹ or a courts martial or something like that, our AOC [Air Officer Commanding] will let us know because if it gets released to the press, he wants us to know about it to squash the rumors.”* (Male)
- **Focus group participants indicated that “Cadet X” letters²⁴² were another method of communication, but in most cases these letters were used for honor cases as opposed to incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that they are being given the right amount of information and an acceptable level of detail, given the need for confidentiality in cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“I think right now the e-mails and letters and stuff like that [are enough]. If you want to read it, you will.”* (Female)
 - *“The danger with [knowing the details] is that this place is a huge rumor mill. So the second you start to get to specifics, then people are like, ‘Oh, do you know who that was?’ and the story just gets blown out of proportion.”* (Female)

Desired Communication About Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that communications from the Academy should be given to students before it reaches the general public and press.**
 - *“[We want to be] informed in case people ask us. We’re not supposed to talk to [the press] and stuff, but if somebody from your hometown is asking you about it, you should be well informed so you can talk about it reasonably.”* (Female)
 - *“A lot of times I get a call from my parents saying, ‘Hey, what’s going on?’ I’m like, ‘What are you talking about?’ No one knows what’s going on here. That upsets me a lot of the time. I hear things second or third-hand from my parents, quicker than I hear it from CM [cadet military] leadership here.”* (Male)

²⁴¹ Military nonjudicial punishment.

²⁴² “Cadet X” letters are released to students at the Air Force Academy to summarize disciplinary action taken against a cadet, but with the cadet’s name replaced with a letter of the alphabet.

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated they would also appreciate receiving any amount of information that would help dispel rumors, even if details could not be released for confidentiality reasons.**
 - *“If people hear about [something] and rumors start going around, then maybe they should not release all the details, but [at least try to] set the story straight.”* (Female)
 - *“Whether it is something that happened this weekend or something that is being done as a result of a survey, they need to make sure that all of us know and it’s not just like a rumor mill thing. Because we want to be told straight up front, even if you can only give us a little bit, we just want to know.”* (Female)
- **When asked if they would like to receive more in terms of general statistics and survey results, some focus group participants expressed interest, as long as the presentation is kept short and simple.**
 - *“If you hear that 20% of the cadets are saying they’re getting harassed, and you look at your squadron and you have at least five girls, [that means that] probably one of them [has gotten harassed]. You’ll be more aware of it.”* (Male)
 - *“I’d like to see a comparison of the other two academies, USMA and Annapolis. Do we have a problem or do we all have a problem or is it just a perception of a problem? I think we need to know where we stand.”* (Male)
 - *“[With the current statistical briefings], it’s pie charts the entire time. And we don’t need that kind of information. The bare bones analysis of what we said and what we could do to change that [would be better].”* (Female)
- **Other participants in the focus groups, however, indicated that they were somewhat suspicious about the accuracy of survey data and how it is presented.**
 - *“Most people probably don’t even answer [surveys] truthfully because it’s done at lunch. And if you get it done in five minutes you can take a nap.”* (Male)
 - *“They butcher the statistics to sound better. ... Instead of saying, ‘80 percent of cadets hated this particular training event,’ they’d say, ‘Almost one fourth of you really enjoyed this.’”* (Female)

Alcohol

The topic of alcohol was included in the SAGR2007 focus groups because incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault very often involve its use. USAFA cadets discussed how

alcohol may lead to sexual misconduct, reasons for using alcohol, effectiveness of alcohol policies, and alcohol training. They were also asked how cadets can protect themselves from getting involved in a situation of sexual harassment and/or assault when they have been drinking.

Role of Alcohol in Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Incidents

- **Focus groups participants agreed that alcohol plays a significant role in situations of sexual harassment and sexual assault.**
 - *“[Alcohol is involved in sexual assault situations] a majority of the time because nobody here is a serial rapist. There are those few people in the world, but I don’t think we have them here. But I think that of the [assault] things we’re dealing with, almost everything will involve alcohol.”* (Female)
 - *“[Alcohol] loosens you up. People start saying stuff they might not mean.”* (Female)
 - *“Harassment is a lot more prevalent when there is alcohol involved.”* (Female)
 - *“If someone is making more obscene jokes, they’re [usually] drunk, and not thinking right.”* (Female)
- **Focus groups participants indicated that alcohol does not excuse either the victim or the offender in a sexual assault situation, but it does “blur the line” between guilt and innocence.**
 - *“I don’t think that if two people are so drunk they don’t remember having sex that it’s fair to say that someone was raped. ... It’s so frustrating when you hear of someone who might have potentially been sexually assaulted, then you start to hear a little more and it comes down to like two people were drunk and someone regrets something and the charges are all dropped. Someone is still affected by that. Some guy just had to go through probably the most stressful point of his life.”* (Female)
 - *“I think we all know where the legal boundaries lie. But when we hear real-life situations and have to judge them, ... that’s when we start to realize how fuzzy [things get] and where our personal opinions and beliefs start to affect the situation.”* (Female)
- **When both parties in a sexual assault case have been drinking, participants in the focus groups indicated students tend to side against the victim, believing that she put herself in a bad position by getting drunk and that the incident could well have been consensual.**

- *“A lot of times you’ll hear a story about a girl claiming she was raped and guys will be like, ‘Yeah, well she was drunk so it’s her fault,’ even though they know that it shouldn’t be that way. They kind of blame the victim.”* (Female)
- *“Maybe I’m just a hard person, but to me it lessens my sympathy [when someone was drinking and they got sexually assaulted]. Obviously no one deserves to be sexually assaulted, but at the same time, when people are drunk in the dorms and playing strip poker and then something bad happens, I feel bad for the victim, but at the same time I’m thinking, ‘What in the heck were you thinking?’”* (Male)
- *“Here, anytime alcohol is involved, everyone’s going to lean towards, ‘Oh she was drunk. She wanted it then, but not now.’ That always happens here.”* (Male)
- *“An honest victim of sexual assault is entitled to justice ... but it leaves a lot of people wondering what happened because the rules sort of dictate that regardless of what happened, it’s going to be the guy’s fault.”* (Male)
- *“I think it’s consensual when you’re drunk and then the girl blames it on the guy. Sometimes I feel so bad for the guy because he’s going to get in trouble when they were both drunk and they both said yes.”* (Female)

Reasons for Using Alcohol

- **Some focus group participants indicated that drinking takes place because of normal rebellion against the rules.**
 - *“They make it such a taboo to drink alcohol that a lot of kids are tempted to do it just to break the rules.”* (Male)
 - *“That’s the typical response for any kid. Your parents tell you not to do something and then what are you going to do? You’re going to go out and do it. So I’m just saying, if they put such a focus on it, it’s going to become more of a problem. It needs to be explained that it’s not a big deal.”* (Male)
 - *“We value our freedom and our chance to escape so highly that when they take it away from us, we feel that it’s not fair. This weekend they took a weekend that was supposed to be ours and [they] restricted everybody so we had to stay here.”*

I think the highest incidence of OTF²⁴³ and alcohol incidents that we've had was that weekend.” (Female)

- **Other focus group participants indicated that drinking is the way some students respond to the stress of everyday life at the Academy. This line of thought was voiced most often by women.**
 - *“We had a really hard schedule so a lot of people were stressed out first semester.” (Female)*
 - *“It’s like, ‘I don’t even care, this is so hard for me right now.’” (Female)*
 - *“That’s what it all comes down to. If you’re stressed out, some people drink and then that’s where it leads to sexual assault and all that stuff.” (Female)*
 - *“I think [drinking] is a coping mechanism that a lot of people used last semester. They just got so frustrated with how things were going, they were like, ‘I’m just going to go get wasted and not worry about it.’” (Female)*
 - *“You’re a more stable person when you’re healthy. Like if someone were to come on to you and start bothering you, you would have quicker reactions.” (Female)*

Effectiveness of Alcohol Policies

- **Focus group participants indicated that the alcohol policies were reasonable and that students have dealt with drinking in a fairly responsible manner.**
 - *“I think cadets do a good job drinking safely. You can compare it to the other Service Academies and they don’t do it well at all. And they have big problems with all of this stuff. But here we take care of each other. If somebody comes back drunk, you just stick them in their room and you make sure they stay there so they can’t do anything.” (Female)*
 - *“I think now, with a lot more of the awareness, people don’t want to see their buddies get in trouble. ... And you know the females in the squadron and you don’t want to see it happen to them. So I think people now are a lot more inclined to step in. ... If someone comes back drunk to the squad and starts getting a little too touchy feely with a girl, his buddies will grab him and [put him to bed].” (Male)*

²⁴³ Over the fence, an unauthorized absence.

- **Focus group participants indicated that stricter alcohol policies would not likely reduce the amount of drinking.**
 - *“I think more people break rules when they’re cynical. Because they kind of, like, lose respect for the system.”* (Female)
 - *“The system is screwing me, so let’s screw the system. As bad as that sounds, I think that’s the attitude that a lot of people would get [if stricter policies were put into place].”* (Female)
- **Focus group participants indicated that they would like more opportunities to drink on campus. Although a cadet sports bar is located on campus, focus group participants noted that it is not open on weekends and not overly popular with students.**
 - *“I think it would be more healthy for the school to have more opportunities to drink after school on base. I think [cadets] would act with more responsibility than they do now. Because having a drink while you do homework, or having a beer, is not a big deal. You don’t go out to get smashed. You go out to have a beer.”* (Male)
 - *“I think there needs to be like more of an officer’s club for cadets. Not on the hill, but somewhere else on base. Because then you [wouldn’t have to] travel off base to go drinking.”* (Male)
 - *“I think that if we were allowed to have alcohol more, that might actually lessen the problem.”* (Female)
- **A male focus group participant gave an example of a situation when his squadron was allowed to drink on campus and how he felt that promoted more responsible alcohol use.**
 - *“My squadron, personally, we had a kegger in the quad. ... we took it all the way to the Commandant to get approval. And the Commandant was like, all right, no alcohol goes back into the dorms. Both the AOC [Air Officer Commanding] and AMT [Academy Military Trainer] have to be there. There has to be an accountability type thing where there is a limited amount that you can drink for the night. You know, obviously, no underage drinking, whatsoever. And there was—I believe there were five firsties [seniors] that had to stay sober the entire night to kind of over watch it. It was just like a fun thing. We had a barbecue and played volleyball. It was a controlled environment in the quad, right in the middle of our quad.”* (Male)

Ways to Avoid Getting Involved in an Incident While Drinking

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that one of the best ways to protect themselves from becoming involved in a sexual harassment or assault situation when drinking was to have a designated guardian watching out for them.**
 - *“If you’re going to drink, make sure you’re with people you trust. It sounds kind of retarded, but have a buddy system where a group of girls, maybe your roommates or something, and you look out for each other the entire time and are always together.”* (Female)
 - *“In our squad the designated guardian is basically responsible for their actions so you’re going to keep a close eye on them. It’s, like, our AOC [Air Officer Commanding] will give us free passes if we’re DDs [designated drivers], so I’ll go do it all the time and I don’t care. You can still have a good time.”* (Female)
 - *“[The best way to avoid problems is to] have someone look after you. ... I know that plans could change and stuff, but you need to really make sure that you have someone there to look out for everybody.”* (Female)
- **Participants in the focus groups indicated, however, that even when someone was with a designated guardian, he/she still needed to drink responsibly.**
 - *“It’s good to have a check system [like a “wing man”] on you, but you really need to be accountable for yourself and realize that you can’t drink an entire bottle of alcohol and expect your wing man²⁴⁴ to take care of you because you’re a moron and drank too much.”* (Female)
 - *“[You shouldn’t] drink to the extent that you don’t know what you’re doing and that you’ll regret something. If you want to drink, make sure you only drink to a limit.”* (Female)
 - *“There needs to be personal responsibility even when you’re drinking. I think if you have that designated guardian program, sometimes people will start drinking and they start laying the responsibility on their buddy who’s not drinking.”* (Male)
- **Another way focus group participants indicated they could protect themselves from becoming involved in sexual harassment and sexual assault situations was to stay out of potentially risky situations.**

²⁴⁴ “Wing man” refers to a friend who watches out for your best interests.

- “You don’t want to put yourself in a place that you’re going to make poor decisions.” (Female)
- “Just be smart. Don’t drink too much. Know who you’re around.” (Female)

Alcohol Training

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that alcohol training focuses quite heavily on using a designated guardian or “wing man” to help students stay out of trouble when drinking, which is something they appreciate.**
 - “In our briefings they always say, ‘Whatever you do, don’t go [drinking] alone. Make sure that you’re going with someone who is either not drinking or who knows you and you know that they could stop you from doing something that you wouldn’t ever want to do.’” (Female)
- **When asked how alcohol training could be improved, some focus group participants, especially juniors, indicated that they would like the training to focus more on personal responsibility.**
 - “The big thing is just personal responsibility while drinking—watching yourself. That’s not really taught well here, I don’t think.” (Male)
 - “The designated guardian and wing man are almost reactionary methods compared to teaching responsibility in drinking, teaching people not to go out and get plastered, which is more of a proactive method of doing it.” (Male)
 - “I really think the most effective and responsible response to any of this stuff is to say, ‘You guys are adults. You’re being entrusted with a lot. You’re responsible for your actions. If you mess up you’re going to be held accountable for your actions, so act accordingly.’ What more do you really need? You can babysit me through any method you want. Bottom line is, if you behave a certain way, you are going to be held accountable.” (Male)

Additional Topics

At the conclusion of each focus group, cadets were given an opportunity to talk about anything related to sexual harassment or sexual assault. Their comments identify important issues which they would like Academy leadership to know about.

- **Participants in the focus groups indicated that the issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault were generally being handled well and were of less concern than other things, like the stress of day-to-day life at the Academy.**

- *“I think the percentage of sexual harassment and sexual assault here at the Academy is very low. The system of education, the reporting procedures, I think it’s all really good. I don’t know how you could improve it.”* (Male)
- *“With everything that’s going on with Virginia Tech, I’m more scared of stuff like that happening. This is a stressful place. ... I can think of five people, just in my squadron, who may do something like that. That’s scary.”* (Female)
- *“We don’t get briefings on what to do if someone starts doing real crazy stuff. We aren’t even told the warning signs.”* (Female)
- *“I think a lot of people here tend to get depressed. ... I don’t know the warning signs of it because I actually I had to deal with one guy. He, like, told me he wanted to go out with me and I told him I didn’t want to go out with him. And so then, like a couple of hours later, I called him to make sure he was okay because he was kind of upset when I told him that. [Described his actions.] So I ended up taking him to the hospital. But if I had seen that coming, I wish that I would have known what to do.”* (Female)
- **Older participants in the focus groups indicated that the Academy would benefit from making a stronger public relations effort in order to get good news about the Academy into the public eye on a consistent basis.**
 - *“I don’t think we get enough good press, period. I mean not just about this stuff, but just in general. Because cadets are out and about in the Colorado Springs community doing good stuff every day, like coaching Little League soccer and stuff. And no one knows about that. All they hear is, ‘Oh another drunk cadet did something stupid.’”* (Male)
 - *“[We should] get in with the media like USMA and Annapolis do. If they have a scandal, the media protects them and their community crushes it. They put it down before it gets too big. ... People kind of help them out, whereas when it’s us, people are ready to point the finger and put big banners up in the sky.”* (Male)
 - *“That’s just natural, what you see in society. The bad news always comes out first and spreads the fastest. So that’s why you need to have some sort of representative that’s constantly pushing the good stuff, constantly getting that out there, making it interesting, making it fascinating for people.”* (Male)
- **The following issues and concerns were also brought up by participants at the end of the focus groups:**

- Women should be able to wear dresses to the ring dance:²⁴⁵ *“The civilian dates get to wear the typical formal dresses, but we have to wear our mess dress.²⁴⁶ Then we get odd looks.”* (Female) *“At the ring dance [girls] have to wear their mess dress. All of the other girls get to wear pretty, formal dresses, and so right there harassment is going to start.”* (Male)
- Students do not always get a satisfactory response from hotline numbers: *“With some of the numbers they say they’re there all of the time and they’re not. We had an issue with a girl in our squadron ... and we tried to call all of the character people. They’re supposed to be there 24 hours. We called multiple times and multiple people couldn’t get a hold of anyone. ... So if they say they’re going to be there [they should] actually be there.”* (Female)
- Women would like more support for women at the base hospital: *“At the very least could they have a nurse practitioner at the clinic every day so at least there’s somebody? Or not the clinic, but the hospital. They’re only there two days a week.”* (Female)
- A past victim of sexual assault should not be required to attend sexual assault briefings: *“Once we didn’t know it was a sexual assault speech and my friend [who was a past victim] had to sit through it. We went to the counseling center after it happened, and ... I think they’re trying to fix it. But definitely if you have a valid reason for not wanting to listen to a briefing like that, it really should not be mandatory.”* (Female)
- **In spite of the emphasis placed on preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault, focus group participants indicated that much progress appears to have been made.**
 - *“I’ve had some outside experiences too. I mean, compared to these other places—we’ve got, like, heaven here. It seems like to me, as far as the different opportunities you can get, the different resources that you can use, the respect and support that you have from a lot of other friends and cadets and things like that, the safety of the environment. I mean, of all of the places you could go to, it seems like that you’ve got a much better shot here than many other places that I’ve seen.”* (Male)

²⁴⁵ At the end of the junior year there is a dinner/dance/ball where juniors receive their class rings.

²⁴⁶ Formal uniform.

DMDC Service Academy 2007 Gender Relations Focus Groups Report

Appendix A. Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

Introduction to the Focus Group

Good afternoon. My name is _____ and I am with the Defense Manpower Data Center. My colleagues with me this morning/afternoon are _____ and _____. _____ is observing and will help write our report. _____ is our note taker. We have asked you to be here with us to help us investigate issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response. We are conducting these focus groups rather than doing a paper and pencil survey as in past years. Similar focus groups are being conducted at all three Service Academies.

**Time for
Introduction: 5
minutes**

Today I will ask a series of questions regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response. We do not want to discuss your personal experiences with sexual assault and sexual harassment. We do want to discuss issues in general so we can provide guidance to leadership to create the most secure environment possible for you. Any questions?

A few ground rules for the focus group:

- This session will address issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment. You might recall that in spring 2006 representatives from our organization, the Defense Manpower Data Center, administered a survey to students at your Academy on these topics. This year we are not administering a survey, but are conducting focus groups, such as this, to identify any issues that require immediate attention and ask your perspectives on prevention and response issues.
- Please respect each others' opinions. We know you will have different perspectives on issues covered in this focus group. We want to hear those views—that's why we are here today. So there are no right or wrong statements or opinions. In order to preserve your confidentiality, we ask you not to give us detailed information about your own experiences or the experiences of your friends.
- We will record comments but will not record names or other identifying information. Only an analysis and summary of the data will go in our report. If you would like to see how comments are being recorded, please examine what _____ is typing.
- This is a non-attribution session. Although we are taking notes on your comments and suggestions, we will not share anything outside this room that can be attributed to any one of you specifically. It is also mandatory for you to protect the privacy of comments made within this session when you leave.
- Please keep the crosstalk to a minimum. Let me be the focal point for questions and discussion.
- Any questions?

I have eight questions to ask you today, with a few subtopics in each. I will watch the time so we will be able to cover all eight questions by the end of this session at (give specific end time).

First, I am curious if any of you participated in the paper and pencil survey about this time last year? (ask for show of hands)

What do you recall about that survey (allow short comments about it or its administration).

Let's begin by discussing issues of sexual harassment.

**Time for Question:
10 minutes**

1. *Experiences of Harassment* - Based on the 2006 survey, sexual harassment is typically the behavior most often experienced by students at the Service Academies.

- How do you define sexual harassment here at USMA/USNA/USAFA?
- What are the most frequent types of behavior you have observed? (Prompt examples.)
- When does unwelcome humor become harassment?
 - Can you describe for me situations where sexual humor might occur?
 - Can you describe for me situations where such humor becomes unacceptable?
- What factors, if any, in the Academy environment contribute to an atmosphere of acceptance or tolerance of unwanted gender-related behaviors? (allow open discussion, but ensure the following items are discussed)
 - Peer loyalty (not wanting to cause problems for the peers or friends)
 - Telling, laughing at, ignoring unwanted jokes
 - Failing to confront inappropriate behavior
 - Lack of action or feedback on complaints
 - Preferential treatment
 - Fear of ostracism by the Brigade/Company/Squadron
 - Fear of amount of publicity that would be involved if case was known (loyalty to the Academy/not wanting to cause problems for the Academy)
 - Cadet's/midshipman's reputation or style of dressing (e.g., provocative clothing)
- Do these same factors also apply to situations involving sexual assault? How?
- What factors empower cadets/midshipmen to take a stand against sexual assault and sexual harassment?
- What (other) actions should the Academy take to reduce acceptance/tolerance of unwanted gender-related behaviors?

2. *Future Leader Preparation* - What experiences (good and bad) at the Academy have prepared you for dealing with gender-related issues, such as sexual assault and sexual harassment, as a future leader?

Time for Question:
10 minutes

- What methods are the most effective for preparing you for dealing with these issues (training, role models, personal experiences)?
- How does the sexual assault and harassment response and prevention training you receive as a cadet/midshipman apply to your future responsibilities as an active-duty officer? (probe about specific training)

3. *Use of Alcohol* - What role do you believe alcohol plays in sexual assault or sexual misconduct?

Time for Question:
10 minutes

- Does drinking alcohol absolve the *victim* of fault? Does drinking alcohol absolve the *accused* of fault?
- What actions can cadets/midshipmen take to protect themselves from either being a victim of assault, or keep themselves from assuming the role of the aggressor of a sexual assault?
- What type of training do you receive regarding use of alcohol/drugs?
 - Is it effective in preventing misuse of alcohol/drugs?
- Do you think there should be stricter enforcement of policies controlling use of alcohol by students?
 - Such as the random use of a breathalyzer?
- (Use if time permits) In the 2006 survey we asked this question of people who experienced sexual assault (question 38 states: Did the incident (of sexual assault) occur a) when your judgment was impaired due to alcohol, b) when you were so intoxicated that you were unable to consent, c) when the offender(s) was intoxicated, or d) after the offender(s) used drugs to knock you out (e.g., date rape drugs, sedatives, etc.)).
 - Do you think that gives the right choices for us to understand how alcohol might have been a factor in an instance of sexual assault?
- We appreciate that admitting to indulgence in alcohol might be considered a collateral offense and a violation of the Honor Code.
 - How is collateral misconduct being handled here?

4. *Communications* - How does your Academy share information internally with you about incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment? (both general information and specific incident information)

Time for Question:
10 minutes

- Is this the right amount of information? (ask students to elaborate on what is too much or what is not enough information)
- What specifically have you heard about the results of the 2006 survey? (what did they hear and what was the venue)
- What could your Academy do better to help you understand the issues around sexual assault and sexual harassment?

- Are sexual assault and sexual harassment the biggest (social/interpersonal) problems you face as a student, or are there other issues that affect you more (aside from academics, and physical and military training)?
- With all of the emphasis on prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment, why does it still happen?
- What do you think can be done to minimize sexual assault and sexual harassment, at least in the situations where the Academy has authority (i.e., the Academies have less influence over situations where students are away from campus on private time)?

5. *Safety* - In the 2006 survey we learned that the majority of students feel safe from sexual assault and sexual harassment, especially on the Academy grounds. However, not everyone indicated they felt safe, at least not to a large extent.

**Time for Question:
10 minutes**

- Do you agree that most students feel safe from sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy?
- What are the typical situations where one would feel less safe (for both sexual assault and sexual harassment)?
 - In the barracks? With an upperclassman? After sporting events?
- What is the Academy doing to make the environment safe from sexual assault and sexual harassment?
- How much influence does the Academy have, or should it have, in preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment away from the Academy grounds?
- In the survey, we asked about sexual assault and sexual harassment during your summer training/experience. Do you think sexual assault and sexual harassment are more or less of a problem during summer?
 - What could Academy leadership do to reduce sexual assault and sexual harassment during summer?

6. *Training* - Everyone tells us they receive training in sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response and that they understand most key concepts.

**Time for Question:
10 minutes**

- What is the most effective training experience you have had at the Academy for dealing with these situations?
 - Ask for examples.
- What training experience do you think would have the most impact on cadets'/midshipmen's decision making in these situations?
 - In keeping students from engaging in such behaviors themselves?
 - In preventing others from engaging in these behaviors?
- Have you noticed any changes in the training you have received in this past academic year?
 - What was different?

- Does learning about actual incidents of sexual assault and harassment help you understand the importance of these issues?
 - How does your Academy share information internally with you about incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment?
- Can you explain the difference between sexual assault and sexual harassment? (ask for specific distinctions)
- What else should be done to make training more effective in preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment?
 - Is it offered at the right time, for instance, not during lunch?
 - Did it cause you to change your thinking or behavior?
 - Should students be tested on their knowledge of sexual assault and harassment prevention and response?

7. *Mechanics of Reporting* - What is your understanding of the reporting system for experiences of sexual assault?

- Can you explain the difference between restricted and unrestricted reporting?
- Do you know who the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator is? The Victim Advocate?
- Describe the resources that are available on base/post and off.
- Do you think reporting an incident of sexual assault and/or harassment would make a difference at your Academy?
 - Do you trust the system, the program in place today?
 - What can be done to make victims of sexual assault and/or harassment more willing to report it?
- Is justice being done when an incident is reported? Why or why not?
 - Are offenders held appropriately accountable? (ask for examples)
 - Are victims treated fairly? (ask for examples)

**Time for Question:
10 minutes**

8. *Reasons for Not Reporting* - When we ask students who have experienced sexual assault and/or harassment, but who did not report it, why they did not report it, some of the frequent answers are that they did not want to be labeled a troublemaker; thought they would be blamed, or they thought no one would believe them.

- Why are situations of sexual assault and/or harassment not reported?
- What actions would a cadet/midshipman be likely to take if he or she encountered unwanted gender related behavior (such as sexual assault and/or harassment)?
 - Reasons for taking no action?
 - Outside of peer-group/family, who else would a cadet/midshipman talk to?
 - What outcomes would the cadet/midshipman expect?
 - Who would the cadet/midshipman be least likely to discuss this with?
 - Who would the cadet/midshipman be most likely to discuss this with?
 - Are there any other reasons for taking no action?

**Time for Question:
10 minutes**

- What types of unwanted gender related behavior (such as sexual harassment, unwanted sexual contact, sexual assault) would a cadet/midshipman encounter before he or she would be likely to take action to confront the offender, report the incident, etc.?
- How do the effects of tolerance that we discussed earlier affect reporting an incident of sexual assault or sexual harassment?
- A percentage of students told us in the survey that they thought they could handle it themselves.
 - How did they handle it?

This concludes the questions for this session. Do you have any final comments you would like to make?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group. As I mentioned at the beginning, we will treat all of your comments anonymously. There is no attribution to any of you for the specific comments you made today. Please also respect that non-attribution when you leave here today. Our goal is to provide the best data possible and you have helped us greatly today with your comments and insights. Thank you again for your participation.

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14. ABSTRACT This report provides the results for the Service Academy 2007 Gender Relations Focus Group (SAGR2007) study that the Defense Manpower Data Center conducted in response to U.S. Code 10 as amended by Section 532 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007. SAGR2007 is part of an assessment cycle at the Service Academies that consists of alternating surveys and focus groups to assess the incidence of unwanted sexual contact and harassment and related issues at the Service Academies.					
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